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THIS WORK-A-DAY WORLD.

VOL. II.

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THIS WORK-A-DAY WORLD.

BY

HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF

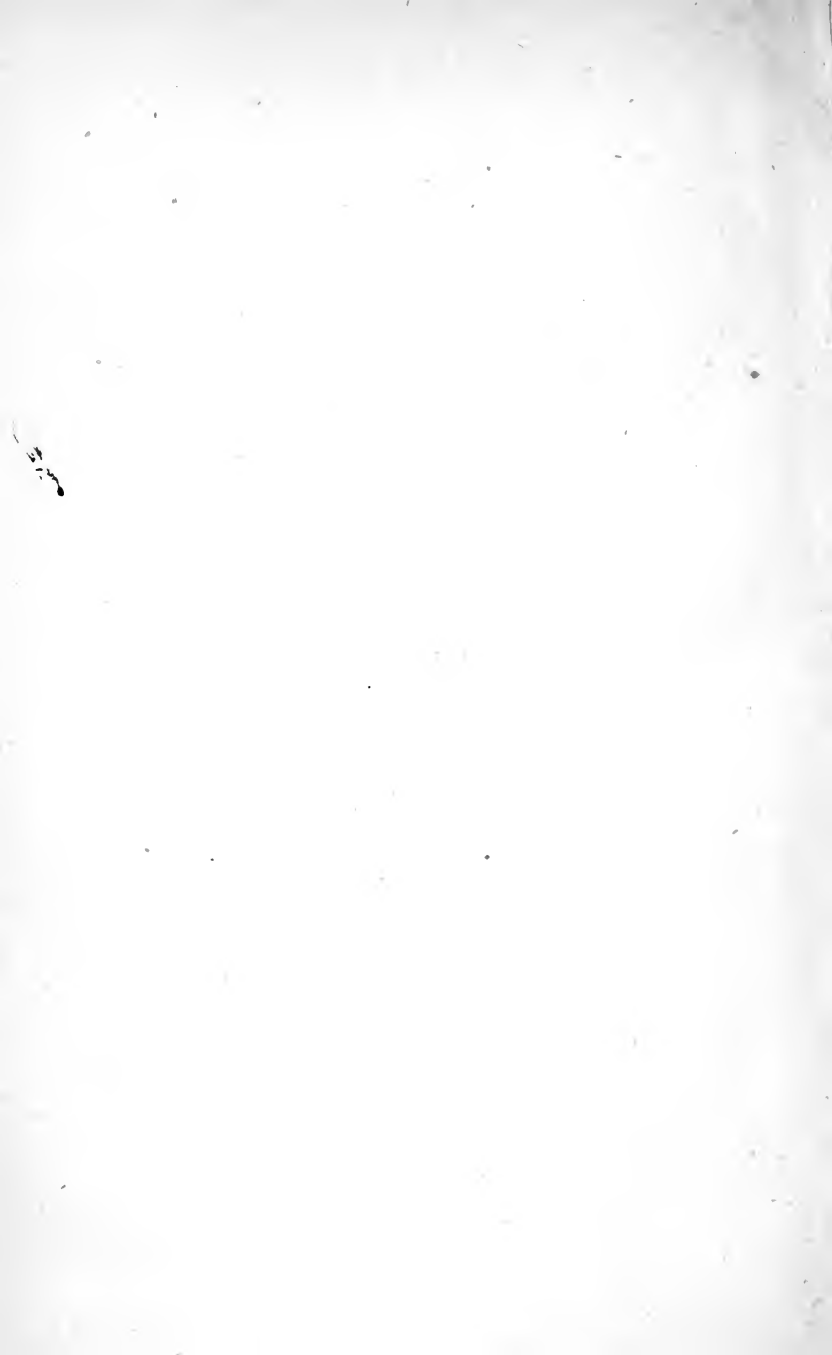
"SYLVAN HOLT'S DAUGHTER," "BEAUTIFUL MISS BARRINGTON,"
"VICISSITUDES OF BESSIE FAIRFAX."

VOL. II.

LONDON:

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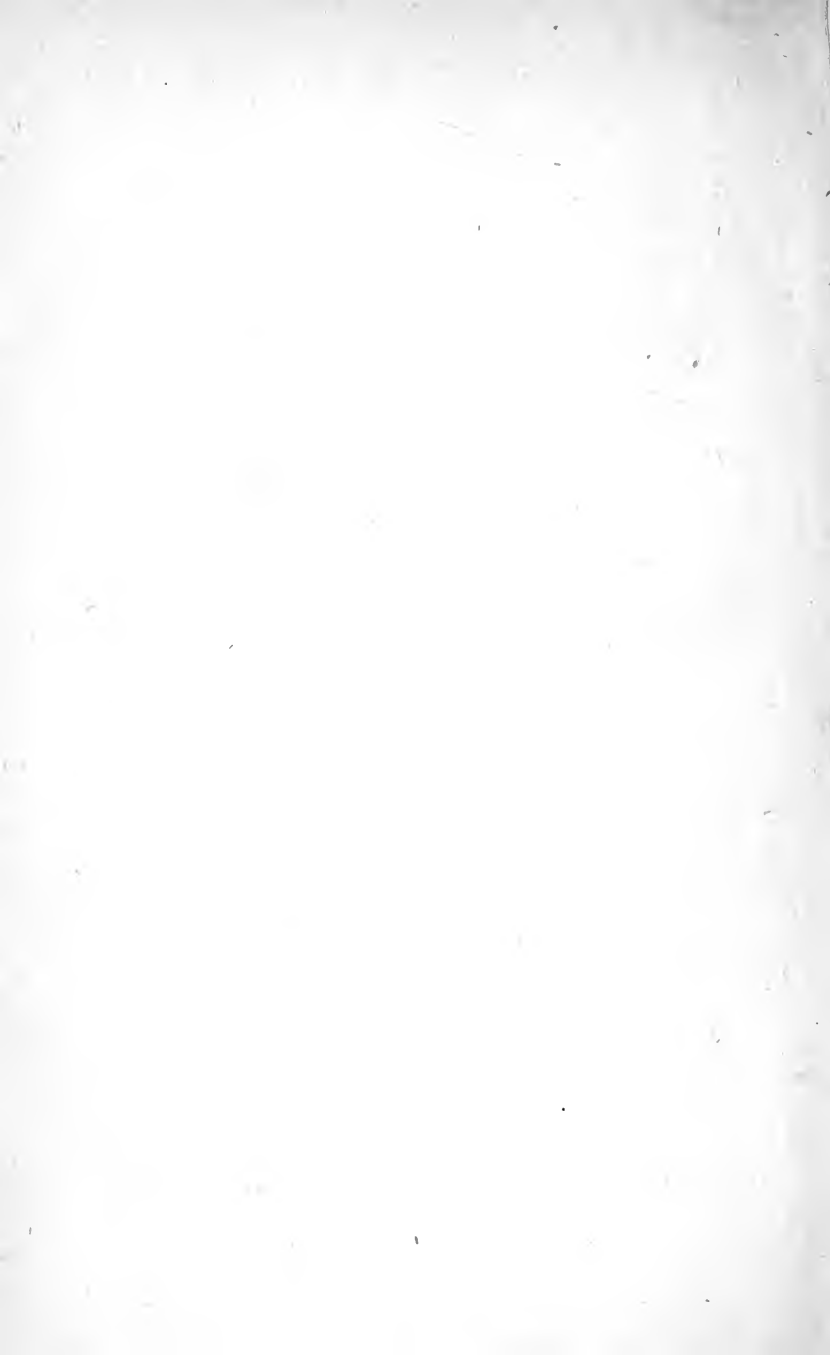
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THIS WORK-A-DAY WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

A MERE QUESTION OF DEGREE.

WHEN Mildred Hutton saw her mother standing at the garden door, she felt as if a long, long space of time had elapsed since she left her. To Winny Hesketh also the interval since the departure for Rockbro' could not be measured as common hours of sixty minutes apiece. Mildred breathed her confession to her mother, and found it less hard than she feared. Winny breathed no confession even to herself, but the firmament of heaven and all things under heaven were new-made for her. She was not of an analytical disposition; she was bright because she was pleased with her entertainment, and joyous because life had

revealed an unexpected sweetness in its innocent and simple pleasures. Mr Durant was so kind, she said to herself, and everybody was good to her here.

The same event went on. Daily there were walks, or drives, or excursions—not far excursions, but to show Miss Hesketh the country, and when the party had to divide, it was said, as of course; ‘Durant will take care of Winny Hesketh. They suit, and get on very well together.’ Durant did not like the trouble of amusing bantering girls, and Winny had nothing to say to the very young men, her contemporaries. Everybody was satisfied, therefore, and the two chiefly concerned were best satisfied of all.

Durant never forgot to be what Winny called *kind*. His temper was mixed largely of indulgence. He liked her, approved her, took to her with a genuine friendliness. She was an agreeable companion; she could listen intelligently, and her ignorance and inexperience did not prevent her conversing intelligently. A man of five and thirty can be very tolerant

of a pretty girl's ignorance. It makes him occasions of instructing her. Winny, on her side, felt that Durant's society was improving. He drew out her powers, and made her exert them. She learnt from him, and remembered much about foreign cities and peoples that would not have so permanently impressed her mind learnt in any other way. In the progress of these lessons their eyes met often, and each became aware that the other was lovable. He never talked nonsense to her, never disconcerted her with compliments, or brought remark or observation upon her. The success of her visit to Foston-under-Wold was to be ascribed in a great measure to Durant's kindness.

And for this reason—Miss Hesketh was introduced as Miss Hutton's governess-friend, and at that date, and in that society, a governess was considered to be, in a fashion, inferior to girls who had fathers able to keep them in their own houses, and portion them off in marriage. Perhaps it is scarcely necessary to state that Winny Hesketh did not coincide in

this view. Her notions of feminine independence were before her time. She put forward no pretensions to match the young ladies with dowers in perspective, but she bore herself with a dignity derived from a sense of being her own mistress in the present, of having her own money of her own earning in her own pocket,—not much of it, but absolutely her own, to spend or to keep, and to render no account of to anybody. Mrs Hutton's numerous sisters, with the prospect of being themselves governesses (unless eligible husbands offered for them), liked to inquire of Miss Hesketh concerning that lot in life, and she answered them always with a cheerful resignation which lifted her to their level of a nice girl who would not refuse to be happy in the natural way of women if she got the chance. But Miss Cradock, Miss Dives, and lively girls of their wealthier sphere, treated her as an elder, sager, lower person, a duenna by profession, quite disabled from rivalry with themselves. And under such circumstances, when thrown amongst strangers, it was undeniably a comfort to have Mr Durant's unfailing,

unobtrusive courtesy to rely on. Winny counted it a necessary element of her pleasure wherever they met. If she had not been already awake to the privileges and responsibilities of her vocation she must have suffered amazement and perplexity. One day there was a proposal of a limited picnic to Comber Priory, and Mrs Hutton could not go. Miss Dives' experience obviated the rising difficulty.

'Oh, Miss Hesketh will chaperone us—won't you, Miss Hesketh?' cried she.

'Yes—with the utmost pleasure,' said Winny, and she said it with the utmost gravity, though Miss Dives was twice as big as herself, and probably twelve or fourteen years older. And to Comber Priory in her brown bonnet and character of chaperone Winny Hesketh went. Mr Hutton tried to make game of her, but she put him to silence by the calm self-possession of her behaviour, and a concise assurance that it was what she had to do constantly on behalf of Miss Broome—a young lady, marriageable and very handsome, more-

over. 'It is,' she said, 'a mere question of degree.'

But there was an old lady, one Mrs Brett, plain and outspoken as countrified old ladies are yet, and she delivered her mind on the matter adversely, and before witnesses with whose presence Winny could have dispensed, had their exclusion lain in her power. This terrible old lady was rich, and without visible kindred or connections, circumstances which made her peculiarities to be endured with singular meekness. Mildred Hutton being an especial favourite of hers, she came over to dine at the House for the express purpose of making acquaintance with Mildred's friend. Winny was bidden to look and behave her prettiest, and this she did without effort. Durant was there, the only other guest, and Winny had an inspired trick of always looking and behaving her prettiest when he was near.

It was at dessert, when there was no escape. Mrs Brett put on a large, impressive pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, and then, lowering her chin and knitting her brows, she gazed over

them full at Winny, sitting opposite, and said with harsh sarcasm (and when she spoke all the world listened): 'So you are the miss-governess that Mildred is so taken up with, are you?—Well, I don't see what's to choose between you and any other miss, that you should give yourself the freedoms of a married woman. It is not usual—and "be ye conformed to this world" is good morals, and scripture too. Suppose a man should be impertinent to you (and let me tell you there are men who are not particular when they see a girl without protection), what should you do?'

'I cannot tell you—it is impossible to be equipped beforehand for every emergency,' Winny replied. 'I don't live in fear that men will be impertinent to me. I go about my business, and it does not lie in the way of impertinent men.'

Mrs Brett wagged her head. 'The Lord keep you!' cried she devoutly. 'You have a deal too much confidence.'

Winny's cheeks were carnation, and Durant next to her, felt that she was a-quiver from head

to foot with scorn, anger, and conflicting, suppressed emotions. There was a perceptible pause of silence, and then Mrs Hutton the elder said, with sympathising moderation: 'In the path of duty there is safety—Miss Winifred has reason on her side. And whether or not, it is a pity to dishearten her, when she has to look to herself. You have nobody but your mother, have you, dear?'

'I have my brother Dick, but he is in London—and more likely to need help than to give it, poor Dick!' Winny had recovered herself, and though her face still burned, she answered in a natural, careless tone.

'Oh, that's it, is it?' said Mrs Brett partially ameliorated. 'Then I pity you—if the brains and the pluck run in the women, and the men of your family are poor trash.'

Winny had by no means meant to convey anything of the sort. She gave one of those silent rejoinders for which she was famous. Mrs Brett was acute enough to understand, and shrewd enough to forgive it, although she had provoked it.

‘Eh, mercy! I’ll let you be! There’s devil enough in you for two folks,’ she exclaimed in that voice of hers which signified a lapse into the highest good-humour. ‘But, you’ll admit that it’s a joke to see a little lass like you mothering about those ancient chickens Bell Dives and her sister—because you are a miss-governess, forsooth, and they are, by courtesy, *young* ladies. They were young in the year one, and have my leave to travel alone from here to Jerusalem—it is the bachelors want chaperones where Bell Dives comes. That’s a word to the wise—meaning *you*. But I am of my own opinion still. There’s no make of the matron about you, whatever there may be, and it is not seemly you should take upon you that liberty—Wait till your turn comes.’

‘It is a mere question of degree,’ Winny said again with invincible tenacity.

Durant to whom the expression was new, heard something so comic in it that he could not keep a grave countenance any longer. He broke into a merry peal of laughter, in which Mr Hutton joined. ‘We must accept Miss

Winifred's dictum—I perceive that she has nailed her flag to the mast, and will stand by it,' said her host, and he stretched out his hand, and patted her on the shoulder, as much as to tell her that she had done right too.

When Winny got an opportunity of stating her private opinion of that terrible old lady, it is to be feared that it was not a very mild or Christian opinion.

CHAPTER II.

A HARVEST FESTIVAL.

THIS mere question of degree which Winny Hesketh had decided, proved a vast convenience when Mr Frank Jarvis arrived at the House to be formally introduced amongst Mildred Hutton's family, friends, and acquaintances. The excursions had to be repeated, and the young people liked to repeat them in a select company. Durant never hung back, and Winny was proud to make herself useful. The happy lovers enjoyed a few rare July holidays, for the weather continued glorious. What roses there were that summer! Then began August, and the harvest. Mr Hutton was too busy to be of their pleasure parties any more, but the pleasure parties went on almost as well without him. When that great cornfield was reaped above Rushmead Old Hall, the corn-

field where Mildred and Winny had rested on the stile one certain hot afternoon half a lifetime ago, watching for Mr Hutton's return from Lownde market, Mr Durant took the opportunity of returning the hospitality of his neighbours by inviting them to assist at the reaping, and afterwards at a collation in his garden.

His neighbours accepted his invitation, and mustered in considerable force. They all went from the House except the two younger boys, and the harvest-field was noisy with volunteer reapers in summer suits and binders in white muslin. Mildred Hutton preferred the cool shade of the trees in the garden, and kept Winny near her, unless Frank came discoursing, and then Winny might wander off if she pleased, but not far. Winny was lazy too, and was contented to look on at the picturesque toils of the reapers and binders instead of helping them. This country-life, so fresh and idyllic, appeared to her like a beautiful poem or painting, to be admired but not possessed.

All the girls from Cranby Rectory were there, chirping and agile as grasshoppers, and some

five or six young men to pair with them, who were pupils of the engineer engaged in constructing a new line of railway to bring this remote wold-district into closer communication with the busy world. Winny Hesketh was sitting on the ground, peaceful and happy, doing nothing and wanting nothing, when one of these lads espied her, looked again, and knew her—a very tall, fair, handsome Scotch lad, Alick Broome, a favourite cousin at Hall Green. He came running up, and paid his respects, and asked Miss Hesketh to come and play at harvesting with the others, but Winny begged to be excused on the plea of being better satisfied to stay where she was. So he would stay with her, to amuse her, all of his good-nature, though she wished he would return to his playfellows, and leave her to her pensive reflections. He did, at length, leave her, when Mr Durant arriving, dropt on the grass at her feet, and tossed off his straw hat wearily. There he lay, reclining and resting himself, giving this one a word and that one a word as his guests trooped into the green enclosure to escape the sultry, dusty,

golden glow of four o'clock, until Miss Cradock broke on his repose with a petition to go through the house, and let some strangers, her friends, see the ghost-room.

‘Would you like to go?’ he asked Winny, and on her acquiescing, said: ‘Then come along—I’ll be your guide myself.’

They were only a few who had not seen Rushmead Old Hall before. It stood four square, without bays or other projection than the porch. It was very old, and at the date of its building men built for their posterity, using hard stone and oak timber. The rooms were long and low, and the windows, glazed in divers patterns, deep sunk in the walls. It was too wild and windy a world round Rushmead in winter for a shrewd architect to expose more surface to the outer cold than could be avoided. There had never been any attempt at alteration or improvement, but neither had there been any neglect. Round every room the wainscot rose shoulder-height, and the space above was painted of some warm tint as a back-ground to the pictures. Though but rarely lived in, they

had an inhabited and even homelike aspect. Durant's mother might have left her parlour, and gone out into the garden to entertain his guests not an hour ago.

Somebody remarked that he must have an excellent housekeeper. He gave no answer, but Winny Hesketh, by whom he stood at the moment, heard him sigh. It was not the spirit of a hired servant, however devoted, that preserved that air of order and affectionate remembrance under his roof.

'This is the ghost-room!' cried Miss Cradock. 'What a comfortable ghost-room! Who would not rather haunt it than lie over yonder in the melancholy churchyard?' A window at the further end looked that way, along the walk under the yew-trees that stretched across the meadows.

'And what is the ghost?' inquired another somebody.

'I have never seen it,' said the master of the house.

'But you believe in it? Don't deny that you believe in such a venerable appendage as a good old family ghost!'

Durant made a gesture of indifference. 'How many generations have been born and have died in this house? Theirs are the ghosts that haunt it—not one, but a long line of them,' said he.

'Was there never a murder done, or an heir suppressed, or a love-distracted maiden? How did it get its name of a haunted house? We have heard of lights at all hours of the night, and, indeed, I have spoken with people who had seen them.'

'No doubt, no doubt. The meadows are marshy where the brook spreads in the hollow. And for anything I know when I am absent, my housewife sleeps in the day-time, and wakes after dark.' Durant refused to admit the ghost, and Miss Cradock gambolled off to the upper story. 'There is nothing to see higher up, Miss Hesketh. Rest here in the cool till our friends come down again,' he said, pushing a chair over to one of the windows which was open. Winny acceded, and Durant took a seat near, with his back against the wainscot, and for several minutes his eyes travelled to and fro

the room, pausing scrutinisingly now on one object, now on another. At length he spoke.

‘This was my mother’s parlour, Miss Hesketh. It was a tender whim of my father to keep it just as she left it. She died during my first year at Cambridge. We were often away, my brother and myself, and my father used to sit here of an evening alone—for company, as he told us. Look—these were her favourite books, her trifles for work and writing—her pearl-handled pen, her agate seal with the two robins on it—birthday presents from us boys. I have heard her protest that none of us ever caused her a heartache!’

Durant had stepped to the table in front of the hearth, and Winny, at his beck, went too. He opened a scarlet morocco folio, and turned over for her inspection, leaf by leaf, a calendar of the year, painted in wild flowers, with poetical descriptions, original and selected, written underneath each group in a delicate, fine hand. While they were thus occupied Alick Broome rushed in and out again, and presently there was a call from the garden for the master. He

prepared to obey it: 'I must go now, but you may look the drawings over by yourself, if you like,' he said, but still lingered. There was another call, and Winny asked if he ought not to make haste. 'Yes—yes. You remind me of my dear mother herself in your gentle, decisive ways, Miss Hesketh.' Winny smiled and blushed without lifting her eyes. 'Do I?' said she. He went away, and she remained where she was, with her pensive reflections.

She was sorry to quit them for conversation with Mrs Brett who shortly presented herself in search of an easy-chair, and peace and quietness. A summons to the lawn and the collation gave her, however, brief enjoyment of them. She asked Winny to lend her an arm to lean on as she walked, for she was lame with rheumatic gout, and as they issued from the house in this kindly proximity, a notice was bestowed upon the young lady which, in her own person, she had not been able to attract. Mrs Brett's patronage was a matter of jealous desire. Winny wondered why; for she was far from courting it herself. The rich old woman was conscious of her

social importance in her own neighbourhood, and might naturally suppose that this insignificant stranger had been imbued with it by her friends, but Winny was not flattered when she made her an abrupt proposal to give up her governing, and live with her as a useful companion.

‘I told Mildred Hutton t’other day that I wished you lived near us—I should often want to invite you in to amuse me. Mildred professes that you are clever, and are going to turn out a book-author—but that’s a queer calling for a female, is it not? What’s there to hinder you giving up your governing, and coming as *dame de compagnie* to me? I’ll treat you well—I’m no tyrant at home, though you mayn’t think it—and I’ll pay you what the other folks pay. All I should require of you would be good-temper, and to write my letters—and to read Saturday’s paper.’

‘Oh, I could not endure that existence of passive restraint!’ cried Winny shaking her head vehemently, and frowning at the frightful vision. ‘I don’t care how hard I work, but let me do something for my living!’

‘What has thrown Miss Hesketh into such a state of agitation?’ inquired Mr Durant laughing and surprised. They had come upon him unawares.

‘Indeed, but she knows how to give herself airs—see the tantrum she’s in!’ Mrs Brett answered him demonstratively. ‘I knew without telling that she was no milk-and-water chit—that she had spirit enough, and more than a dash of the lemon, considerably more. But I didn’t expect to have my kindness flung back in my face as if it were an affront when I made her the offer to change her schoolroom for my house. No, that I didn’t. Folks must go from home to learn news!’

More persons listened to Mrs Brett’s harangue than it was addressed to. Winny felt dreadfully confused, but a pert little girl came unexpectedly to her relief with an offer of herself in the place Miss Hesketh had rejected: ‘I wish you would adopt *me*, Mrs Brett! *I* would keep you alive!’ cried she, jumping up and down, and clapping her hands.

‘Wait until you are asked, Molly Cope,’ rejoined the old lady, not displeased.

Winny’s eyes appealed to Durant for deliverance, and he answered her promptly by taking Mrs Brett on his own arm, and placing her in charge of the clergy. Winny he brought as close to his own neighbourhood at the table as the dignity of her elders and betters allowed, and as far as possible out of Mrs Brett’s range; for the old lady manifested some discontent at losing her, and inquired of her host what he had done with her *sauce piquante*—she liked her *sauce piquante*. Winny had Alick Broome next her, and was pleased in proportion. The lad was thoroughly amiable, and talked of his cousins.

There was a dance on the bowling-green to end with, the music being two fiddles and a cornet; and with harvest-songs in chorus-between-times, the day at Rushmead was brought to a triumphant conclusion.

CHAPTER III.

AT COMBER PRIORY.

THE next distinguished event in the annals of Winny Hesketh's visit to Foston-under-Wold, was a *fête* at Comber Priory. The young people of that part of the world thought it impossible to go to Comber too often in the summer. On the road home from Rushmead Mr Hutton remarked that it was unlucky the engineers had fixed on the twelfth for their entertainment—he was afraid the grouse would prove a rival attraction too strong for some of their invited guests to resist.

‘And you will be gone, Winny,’ Mildred said.

‘No, no, Miss Winifred must stay over that day. What imperative call has she?’ remonstrated her host.

Winny replied that she was due at Hall

Green on the twenty-fifth, and she must spend some time at Cotham with her mother before her holidays ended—besides she had already been nearly three weeks at Foston, and they must be tired of her.

‘We will tell you when we are—I have no objection myself to keep you for another three weeks. But you shall be allowed to go on the thirteenth. Between the thirteenth and the twenty-fifth there is some time.’

Winny’s wishes chimed with Mr Hutton’s invitation. She was glad to stay for the *fête* at Comber. But it was with a sense of disappointment she heard Mr Durant, on the following Sunday, say that he was off to the moors on the eleventh.

‘Won’t you be prevailed on to forego two days’ sport for the entertainment the young railway-fellows are giving themselves so much trouble to get up?’ Mrs Hutton the younger asked him. ‘Frank Jarvis will stretch his business-leave to gratify Mildred, and Miss Hesketh has put off her departure until the day after Comber.’

Mr Durant looked on the ground, then at the horizon, as if consulting oracles, and finally opened his mouth, and said slowly : ‘ I’ll see what I can do,’—and was silent for ever so long after.

For Winny Hesketh the *fete* at Comber meant Durant, and it is likely that Durant guessed it; and debated betwixt the pleasure of giving her pleasure, and the merit of self-denial for both, compensated by grouse for him. He did not consider if there might be compensation for her or not; perhaps because his will still inclined him to be kind. Whether, had Miss Hesketh been less pretty, he would have shown her so much charity, need not be inquired into. Her eyes were very winning—when they looked up to him, with the wistfulness of earnest attention, they were lovely. It stands to reason that had they been otherwise, had they been dull and lustreless (like twenty score pair of eyes in a day), Durant would not have seen the beautiful soul in them; for he was a man of simple, unsophisticated mind, although he knew the world so widely.

Then Miss Hesketh’s ways, her airs and graces

were new and amusing. He felt protective towards her; for, though on no account would she be treated as helpless and dependent, the timidity and inexperience inseparable from her age, her sex and her manner of life crept out in spite of her endeavours after dignity and universal propriety. Mr Hutton had set the example of addressing her with good-humoured raillery, and Mr Durant imitated it, with a difference. Winny did not resent the freedom very highly. All her life her friends had taken this tone with her, and she was submissive to it, as implying fondness, and not excluding respect. She might blush with shy or laughing deprecation, but from Durant it sounded what she still called —*kind*. And Durant meant to be no more than kind. But men are carried insensibly beyond their best intentions, and he was sliding into danger. A fear and suspicion dawned upon the mind of Mrs Hutton the elder that Sunday afternoon, as she observed the two in the garden, talking together across one of her rose-bushes. Mrs Hutton was at the drawing-room window, and Mildred was mooning with

a good book in a quiet corner. (Her dear Frank had gone to his own home for a few days, to return for the expedition to Comber).

‘Mildred, look here,’ said her mother with a slight gesture towards the objects of her notice. ‘I hope your little friend is not growing too fond of Leonard Durant’s company? That would be a pity, indeed!’ Her voice implied that she knew a good reason why it would be a pity.

Mildred rose, and gave one careless glance at them: ‘Oh, there is no fear for Winny,’ said she with a sort of tender depreciation. ‘She is very affectionate, but she is not one of the “inflammables,” as you used to call me. I don’t believe she knows what love means, and she has a whole battery of philosophical arguments against it.’

‘I don’t remember that philosophical arguments or any arguments prevailed to help you, Mildred,’ said her mother drily. ‘However, you know her best. She is a nice girl, and I am always sorry for a girl who gives her love for nothing.’

And there the matter dropt.

As Winny Hesketh was to return to Cotham the day after the expedition to Comber she made her preparations the day before. In the course of her packing she came upon the manuscript story that she had brought for Mildred's perusal. It had not been opened—it had been forgotten by Winny herself, in fact.

‘I don't think we shall ever write that joint book now, Milly,’ said she, holding up the roll of papers significantly.

‘I don't think we shall—Frank has put a stop to ever so many things I meant us to do. It cannot be helped!’

‘And is not to be cried over—I shall write the book by myself.’

‘Dear little Winny, you had much better look out for a Frank of your own. You need not to go to Comber in your brown bonnet to-morrow.’

‘I don't intend.’

Winny resumed her packing, and Mildred reverted to her sweet musings. The girls at the Manor School used to say that Mildred

Hutton passed half her life in a dream. It was certainly true of her at this time. But she was so entirely, blissfully happy that it was the last thing in the world Winny would have thought of, to complain of her absorption. She loved reverie herself more and more.

Mr Durant did not go to the moors on the eleventh. He stayed for the *fête* at Comber, and made one of the Hutton party on the road, riding on this occasion with Mr Melhuish. Mildred and Frank rode also. Mr Hutton could not go: he was dreading a break in the weather, and dared not lose a day at his harvesting. Winny Hesketh went in the phaeton, driven by young Mrs Hutton, two of whose sisters filled the back-seat.

It was a large and miscellaneous gathering, for the engineers were about to migrate, and before quitting the wold-country quarters where they had been a most welcome and agreeable addition to society, they desired to return the copious hospitality they had enjoyed in the neighbourhood. Chaperones were limited to

a few. It was, indeed, useless to burden a festivity meant to consist of climbing ruins, roaming woods, dancing and a picnic dinner with gouty and other infirm subjects—they had had their day, and it was their duty to be happy and contented in the happiness and contentment of the coming generation—somebody original dared to make that bold declaration, and it was judiciously acted on. When the company were all assembled within the Priory bounds youth was in the ascendant. There were only two gentlemen with white hair, one born so, and in spectacles, who was the engineer-in-chief, and the other Mr Dawson, the proprietor of Comber. Of old ladies there were none. Young Mrs Hutton and five or six matrons, her contemporaries, were the duennas.

But, lavish preparation and wise precaution notwithstanding, the *fête* at Comber did not escape the bane of disappointment that waits on picnics. How many of these gala celebrations ever do turn out what the assistants blithely dream they must? With the woes, material

and sentimental, that befell the rout of the company this story cannot meddle, but one incident that happened early in the day, and quite marred the anticipated pleasure of the guests with whom it is most concerned, must needs be recorded. It was *the* incident of the picnic to Winny Hesketh and Durant.

At Comber Priory there was a wonderful lovely view to be seen for those who had the pluck to climb the ruinous stair of the clerestory in the chapel, and pass along the gallery that ran above what was the great west window ; but it required a nerve, for the parapet was gone, and it was rough footing with the broken stones and loose stones amongst the ivy.

‘Dare you venture, Miss Hesketh?’ Mr Melhuish asked her. Winny would certainly venture if there was anything to reward her. Mr Melhuish had been, and had come down again, and could assure her that she would be well rewarded.

Two or three of the young engineers had gone up since, and seeing a clear way before her, Winny followed. When she had mounted

a dozen steps she heard some one behind her, and making a little haste, emerged suddenly into the dazzling sunshine. The light was very strong in her eyes, but when she had scanned the view all round, she walked along the rugged way with cautious swiftness, and not a thought of danger until she was about half-way across, when Alick Broome espied her from below, and shouted out: 'Eh, you, up there, mind you don't fall!'

Unwisely Winny halted, and looked down. It was a dizzy height. She felt herself wavering—she had an idea of trying to turn back, when Durant's voice behind her, said harshly: 'Go on, Miss Hesketh; what are you stopping for?'

'I did not know you were there,' replied Winny, and recovering her balance with the shock, went on as she was bidden.

The descent was by another broken turret-stair, and Alick Broome came half-way up to help her down. It was awkwardly precipitous in places, and Winny thankfully availed herself of his assistance till she landed safe at the bottom.

When Durant appeared he was white with

anger: 'You officious young fool, what possessed you to call out to Miss Hesketh and put her in such peril?' exclaimed he, addressing Alick.

Winny saw with surprise and perplexity that he was shaken past control. Alick looked at him with deprecating humility and confessed that it was a heedless trick; and then, with a shame-faced glance at Miss Hesketh, conveyed himself away.

Durant did not excuse his outburst. 'You are safe,' he said to Winny. 'But when I saw you hesitate, and stretch out your hand, I shut my eyes—I could not reach you.' He was silent. He had taken the hand she had stretched out, and held it painfully hard, gazing at her with an emotion he could neither hide nor suppress. 'I have been in some dangers in my time, but I do not remember ever to have suffered such a minute of supreme anguish as I have just passed through,' he said in a subdued tone. Then, after another pause in which Winny's eyes began to shine with sweet solicitude, he added: 'Don't put your-

self in any more risks to-day,' and dropping her hand, he left her abruptly.

Winný stood for some moments where she was. She took off her glove to relieve her white, cramped fingers, and said to herself: 'I was not aware of my peril.'

And that incident was the end of her pleasure this fine picnic-day. Durant did not return to her. She lost sight of him altogether, and though she heard several inquiries of his whereabouts, she heard no satisfactory answer. She rambled in the woods, and they were delightfully umbrageous; she perambulated the flower-gardens, and they were gaudy and glowing; she shared the feast, and that was in its way perfect—but the glory of the day was departed.

About four o'clock a sudden gloom overspread the earth, and a rapid assembling of black clouds in the sky gave warning of a thunderstorm which burst with a heavy shower, and compelled a general flight to the inn. The inn boasted one large room used for tenants' dinners and similar festivities, and

there the multitude flocked. It had not been intended to begin dancing so early, but the music was at once called for, and the weather valiantly defied.

Winnie Hesketh stood at the window watching the rain, and presently to her came Alick Broome, and said: 'Durant has forsaken us, Miss Hesketh.' Winnie made some indifferent reply, and being asked if she would dance, said she was tired, and would rather not. However, as girls were in a minority, she had to do her duty, and dance many times—indeed every time, until the rain having abated, Mrs Hutton sent her a message to slip away, for their party were going. Winnie obeyed the summons without a wish to linger. So much did the presence or absence of Durant make for her pleasure or the reverse.

Comber was not more than five miles from Foston, and the road ran through Rushmead. Mildred and Frank had ridden on in advance. The evening was unsettled, though beautiful after the storm, and Mrs Hutton feared Winnie would have a bad day for her journey on the

morrow. 'And if the weather break now, it will retard the harvest and spoil the grouse-shooting,' she continued. 'By the by, Durant left Comber early—I wonder why?'

'I don't know,' said Winny. She had begun to think she should not see him again before she went away.

But when they came within view of that stile by the roadside, they smelt first the perfume of his cigar, and then they saw him, coming across it to bid them good-night. He had recovered his usual easy manner, and as Mrs Hutton pulled up for a minute, he announced that he should be off to the moors by six o'clock in the morning. Mrs Hutton supposed that he would be home again for the partridges. 'Yes,' he said, 'yes, I hope so.' The rain is coming on—I won't keep you. Good-night—good-bye, Miss Hesketh.' He shook hands with them all, and with Winny last. 'When are we to see you next?' he asked her.

'Ah, that I don't know; that I cannot tell you,' answered she.

'Before very long—before next midsummer,'

said Mrs Hutton. 'We shall not give her time to forget us.'

It had been agreed that Winny must be one of Mildred's bridesmaids, and the wedding was to be in the spring.

'Well, good-night,' he repeated. 'Good-bye,' and stood back in the road as Mrs Hutton drove on.

When the House was reached everybody confessed to being tired, and that was a happy excuse for going off silent to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

SWEET SEPTEMBER DAYS.

THE widow Hesketh never made communications of importance in her letters, but as Winny sat at tea with her on the evening of her return to Cotham her mother told her there was a change in the house. Mr Andrews had accepted an appointment in London, and in his room was now established a clergyman, a poor young curate, broken down by hard work in a great city, whom Dr Archer had asked her to take in because he required care and good nursing to bring him round to health and strength again.

‘Very well, mother; if you are satisfied, so am I. But why has the short-faced gentleman, why has our Mr Spec. forsaken dear and familiar Cotham for everything strange in London? I thought he meant to live and die with us.’

‘So did I, Winny. It was quite a sudden move. But he is gone, and Mr Nicholls does not like the piano.’

‘I will not trouble him, poor fellow, if he be ill. I hope he is not very ill, mother, for your sake?’

‘No—he is rather tedious and capricious, but I endeavour to please him. And now, Winny, tell me about your visit to Miss Hutton.’

Winny told all her gaieties at large, gave an account of all her recent acquaintances, not forgetting Mr Durant and Mrs Brett, or even minor characters and actors in the fresh fields and pastures new from which she had just returned. Her mother heard nothing to alarm her fears, and was gratified by the honour to be put upon her daughter as Miss Hutton’s bridesmaid—respecting which she suggested that the dress that did for the wedding at Foston would do again for Delphine Mercier’s wedding, unless Delphine’s took place the first; an economical notion in which Winny was not ashamed to acquiesce.

The space before the end of her holiday

which Winny Hesketh had to spend at home was not long. She had something every day to do, and her humour was altogether cheerful and contented. Her mother said the visit to Foston had done her good, to which Winny rejoined that a little diversion was good for everybody. Miss Denham was still absent from Cotham, and the Holworth Grange people were at the sea, but Delphine Mercier was trudging about the town, giving occasional and holiday-lessons, and Miss Baxter and Miss Maria were in their groove—the one embroidering, the other dispensing physic, perfumery, and tea, with the usual moral reflections on the tediousness of customers and the perplexity of bad debts. The old ladies were glad to see Winny, they loved her best of all their young friends, and proud to introduce her to a black-browed, thick-set gentleman, their nephew, native of Wimpleburn and professor at Cambridge—a great scholar in history, as they explained to her: ‘And as you are both so mighty clever, you ought to be friends,’ said Miss Maria. But the professor was mighty glum as well as mighty clever, and

Winny felt too frivolous to enter into his discourse. Not that he asked her. When told that she was a governess, he mentioned the high respect in which he held women who devoted themselves to honourable work—then he talked of family matters to his aunts, and gave her the least notice possible. Winny disentangled skeins of silk, and heard his big voice remotely booming through a reverie of the garden at Foston. Miss Baxter remarked to her sister afterwards, that it was very provoking: young people who ought to take to each other were always perverse, and never did—and if she was not blind, little Winny Hesketh, demure as she looked, had got somebody in her head.

The idea thus frankly expounded by Miss Baxter penetrated the brain of Delphine Mercier also during the first hour of confidence they two spent together. Delphine was preparing her wedding-garments, on a modest scale and with prudent foresight, and she enlisted Winny, who was skilled in beautiful stitches, to give her help and advice, which Winny was delighted to do. They sat in the study upstairs

at Delphine's house—in the room where her father used to give his lessons, where he would never give them any more—and talked like veritable wise women—that is, Delphine did : Winny was best at listening, and it struck Delphine once or twice that she listened a little absently, as if she were running after her own thoughts while lending her ears with such serious, mild attention.

To prove her Delphine hazarded a speech : ‘ Yes, I shall choose my wedding-gown as Mrs Primrose did hers—one to be useful on other occasions ; and as it will be cold weather when we are married, I am thinking of green baize. What do you think of green baize, Winny ? ’

Winny murmured composedly that she thought it would be very nice. ‘ And you will wear a bonnet—not a wreath and veil ? ’ she added.

Delphine gave her a scrutinising, merry look, and exclaimed : ‘ I’ve found you out ! You have not heard a word I’ve been saying. Now what did I say my wedding-dress should be ? ’

‘Green baize,’ replied Winny colouring—
‘Some new stuff, is it?—Surely not what they
cover swing-doors and Family Bibles with?’
and she laughed.

‘Ah, you are deep, very deep, but not so
deep as you fancy, Miss Winny,’ rejoined her
friend, wagging the head of derision. ‘*Tell*
me, now?’

Winny calmly required another of those
handkerchiefs that were to be hem-stitched,
and all Delphine’s insistance did not elicit
another blush, or the slightest further self-
betrayal. She was set on her guard, however,
or, perhaps she tried to play at self-deception.
What she said was, that she must not give way
to weaving her webs for stories except when
alone, lest she should become absent-minded
—as grave a drawback for a governess as deaf-
ness. Delphine heard her plea with courtesy,
but she was not convinced that her discernment
had overshot the mark.

Miss Hesketh’s return to Hall Green was
not a day of dolour either to herself or her

pupils. There was vast effusion of talk at tea, and Sissy communicated that Miss Hesketh had been heard of through Cousin Alick Broome.

‘Yes—he told us that he had almost been the death of you,’ quoth Mab who still presided over the schoolroom tea-pot on high solemnities. Winny laughed at the exaggeration, and recounted the incident that Alick Broome had acted in.

‘Papa said it was foolish and dangerous to startle anybody upon a height,’ observed Clemmy with her customary propriety. And then, out of the fulness of her heart, she began to speak of her personal concerns—‘O Miss Hesketh, papa will not buy me Keightley or Hume—he thinks Markham and Magnall go quite far enough for girls. But we may have books out of the library, as many as you please.’

‘Oh, do leave lessons alone till to-morrow, Clem,’ pleaded Mab. ‘Clem has been flattered that she has a great deal of talent, Miss Hesketh, and I expect you will have to suffer for it. She is going to live for a purpose.’

The young governess did not expect that she would have to suffer very severely, and she was in health and spirits to bear it—so she stated and so she looked. Everybody complimented her on her blooming and lively aspect, and Mrs Broome, between herself and her husband, made some private remarks on a few idle words that Alick Broome had spoken without intention.

The next day they all fell into their places and routine of work. Clemmy's threat of living for a purpose proved real, and she was remorseless in making Miss Hesketh serve it. At the root of Winny's character there was a deposit of most easy good-nature, which would always render her liable to heavy taxation by encroaching and selfish persons, and Clemmy began to impose upon her with an admirable coolness of which she only by slow degrees became aware. The young lady would invade the schoolroom, or even the sky-parlour in the turret, during the sacred hours of recreation, bringing piles of volumes up to her chin, which she would let slide upon the floor by Winny's chair, with the

following preface or introduction of her demands—

‘Oh, dear Miss Hesketh, papa does not care about light pencil-marks that can be rubbed out, only he wishes you to look over all the passages I must read. I have made notes of my questions—let me see, here they are—I will not give you them all at once.’ Winny hoped not; the first instalment filled a closely-ruled quarto sheet. Clemmy read: ‘I want to know all about the feudal customs as they affected girls and women—the chief message went to the eldest daughter when there were no sons, and there was a fuss about the marrying of heiresses—do you believe they were really ever married at fourteen? If they were, Mab must be quite an old maid.’ After a pause of reflection, which Winny did not interrupt, the inquiring scholar passed to her next head: ‘Then I want to understand clearly how the Petition of Right came to be invented, and why so many of the men who resisted King Charles in parliament while they were only squabbling over taxes and old statutes went over to his side

when it came to fighting? And do you call Wentworth a traitor to his party or to the country? Oh, and what is divine right? I have brought you Hallam and Clarendon and Macaulay, and if there is anybody else—

‘Enough for the present, Clemmy,’ Winny would say, withdrawing a pair of serenely musing eyes from the sweetness of the September evening to turn them on the pages of constitutional history, Clemmy often standing with an arm round her neck to keep watch over her at her task. For let it be confessed that Winny’s conscience was satisfied with duty when the children went to dessert, and she did not like to forego her needful rest and refreshment, whether she took a twilight stroll in the retired paths of the garden, or a spell of equally needful sewing, relieved by meditative gazes out of window—at the soft, deep, purple-black shadows under bush and wood when rain-clouds were coming out of the north, at the yellow light receding from the high tree-tops that nodded west, at the silvery grey and blue silences still undisturbed in the east and the south when

the cloud-curtain was sweeping down in a shower.

But it came natural to her—or came by that habit which is a second nature—to respond to her pupils' requirements, and she applied herself to satisfy Miss Clemmy's with care and precision. Thus indulged, Clemmy would soon give her no peace at all—even out walking, being the eldest in the schoolroom, she claimed the right to her governess's arm, and daily beguiled her into the delivery of peripatetic lectures when Winny would have been much the better for holding her peace. But she bore the persecution, unconscious of its burden, for so strong, so light-hearted and buoyant as she felt after her holiday. The world was never to her so beautiful a place as it was through this September at twenty years old. She was up in the morning early, and saw the silver cobwebs and the delicious faint windless sky of autumn in the cool hours before the sun glowed on the stubbles and the changing woods. And work and play alike were easy to her—for she was happy. She did not ask herself why—

she let that alone. If any one else had asked her, she would have been perplexed to answer. Perhaps she would have said it was because she was young, and had nothing to vex her. Nothing to vex her!

One dancing-day when Miss Hesketh had seen her young ladies safe at the Manor School for their music-lesson, and was on her hurried way to Castle Green, she met Mr Durant. She blushed and dimpled with the glad surprise—was so confused with the sudden joy that she could not recollect afterwards what she had said by way of greeting, but she hoped and believed, nothing. Durant would turn and walk with her at a slackened pace. His manner was still the same kind and simple manner that had gone so far to make her happy at Foston.

A long while ago Winny had read in her Homer of Nausicaa, at the sight of Ulysses, desiring that the gods might give her just such a noble spouse. If it had been possible for Winny Hesketh, after all the prudent counsels and cautions she had imbibed, to wish a wish

of that nature, Durant would have been her Ulysses.

He did not mention any affairs that he had in Cotham—indeed, he said that he had never been in the town before. Of course, Winny could not imagine that he was there only to see her. They were not ten minutes together. At her mother's door he shook hands with her cordially, promised to let her friend Mildred Hutton hear how blithe and bonny she was looking—those were Mildred's terms for her—and then marched off as if duty and pleasure both were satisfied.

That was a happy day. The widow Hesketh was insensibly cheered by her daughter's animation. Mrs Brunton remarked to Mam'zelle that Miss Winifred had turned out really nice looking—quite a charming countenance. The tedious dancing-hours slipped over imperceptibly in the wake of Winny's vision, and the drive out along the country-road to Hall Green was too swift by half.

There, at the end of it, was dear, indefatigable Clemmy, eager to resume her inquiries into the

rights and wrongs of the Puritans whom Whitgift harried for Queen Elizabeth. 'Oh, I cannot talk about harrying anybody now—I'll play you at ball if you like!' cried the governess, impetuously arresting the flow of her excellent pupil's judicious curiosity.

Mrs Broome happened to be in the way, and to overhear the challenge: 'I think,' said she, 'less book and more ball would be good for your figure, Clemmy. Thank you, Miss Hesketh, for the wise proposal.'

And until tea was ready there was a game at ball, Mab joining, and Winny keeping hers up to past a hundred. Mr Broome, wondering at the noise, came out of his study to see what it meant, and remarked, but not in a displeased tone, that the big children were worse than the little ones. Miss Hesketh, being in the spirit and pride of the play, would not have let her ball down for king nor kaiser, and went on tossing and backing and turning with the quickest light graceful movements, and all in rhymic time.

'She is a very handsome little woman, and I

wish your conjectures may be true,' the gentleman said to his wife afterwards, referring to her idea that had sprung from those idle words of Alick Broome.

'I wish Miss Hesketh well, certainly, but I do not wish to lose her. She is sensible and conscientious, and gives me no trouble to keep in good-humour, which is a great thing,' said the lady. 'I have a horror of misunderstood, low-spirited young women ; a governess of that character would be the plague of my life.'

CHAPTER V.

CHILL OCTOBER DAYS.

MISS DENHAM did not return to Cotham until nearly the end of October, but as soon as she did return, she let Winny Hesketh know of it, and invited her to pay her a visit next dancing-day, as late in the afternoon as she conveniently was able.

Winny had played many games at ball, and had elucidated many historic problems for Clemmy Broome between the sweet September day when she met Mr Durant in the town, and this chill October day when she obeyed Georgie's summons. She committed her pupils, for once, to the care of excellent Miss Molyneux, and confided to the practical wit of Sissy the ordering of the carriage to come round for her to Mr Denham's house, when the dancing-lesson was over.

Georgie was in her sanctum, with an unusual air of preparedness about it, and a splendid fire. She sat at ease in her own peculiar chair, dressed in her own peculiar style, reading in French, a work connected with her own peculiar studies. Winny came in, gay and happy, her eyes full of light, her cheeks rosy with the cold—it was always a great joy to her to see Georgie. She was begged to take a chair by the hearth, but preferred one at a distance from the fire, on the comfortable old sofa at the further side of the table—on account of the frosty air out of doors, she said, but in reality on an impulse to place herself beyond the range of Georgie's scrutiny. Something in Georgie's reception of her, warm but embarrassed, had roused in Winny a wary expectation of intelligence that might be a surprise, accompanied with pain, and possibly, a call for fortitude.

And, in fact, Georgie had somewhat on her mind to say—imperative to be said, as she judged, but difficult and delicate nevertheless. She discoursed delusively of other matters to lead the way, but Winny was marking her pre-

cautionary steps, and became sensitively alive when she approached the burning question, thus—‘I have not seen you since that ball at Rockbro’, Winny. Pray, how did you get on afterwards?’

‘Oh, capitally! They are all so kind at Foston. I am to be Mildred’s bridesmaid, you know, in spring,’ Winny said, watchfully on guard.

‘I am glad you get a little pleasure in your life—it must be dull enough in general. Mr Durant, will he be at the wedding?’

‘I hope so. Why do you ask that, Georgie? He is a most agreeable and pleasant gentleman, courteous to everybody, and very kind to some.’

Georgie elevated her chin, an expressive gesture with her, and was absolutely silent for three or four minutes—not disputing her previous conclusions, but reflecting whether she might not be on the verge of an impertinence. Winny drew towards her on the table a journal of medical science, and reading off the title, observed that Georgie still inclined, then, to pursue her vocation of a healer?

‘Yes. I mean to be of use in that way. Do you remember what first made us two friends at school?’ Georgie said, contemplating the antique buckles on her Spanish leather shoes, stretched out, and crossed lightly the one over the other on the bear-skin rug.

Winny appeared to consider before she answered: ‘You took a thorn out of my hand. If there is any question of taking out thorns to-day, Georgie, I think—perhaps—I’d rather not—I’d rather put it off.’

‘No, you would not, Winny. You fancy so at this moment, but before you had gone the length of the street you would come back, and ask to have it over.’

‘Well, then, go on—let me have it over.’

‘You are such a healthy soul that I am not apprehensive of bad consequences following on the operation. Mr Durant is married. You did not know that, did you, Winny?’

‘No. He lives as a bachelor. Well, Georgie, is the thorn out? Is that the thorn? He never spoke of love to me. Why should he not be married?’ Winny’s voice vibrated clear and

high as a silver bell. She pushed away the journal, and came and stood over against the fire, in front of her friend, resting a foot on the fender. There was another silence—it is not the business of a physician to convince a patient that he suffers. Stoicism is not amiss in sharp cases : it economises energy, and the reparative powers. The day was growing dusk, but the light of the fire shone full in Winny's face—her bright eyes were curiously veiled as with a film, and her lips apart as if to breathe were a hardness.

‘You will scorch your dress, Winny. What a pretty soft violet shade it is,’ Georgie said in her gentle manner.

‘It begins to be an old thing now—it was the last thing my mother gave me when she started me in the world—before I went to Hall Green,’ Winny replied, and took her foot from the fender, and drew her dress away from the risk of scorching. Then she looked up at the window, and remarked how black the evening was turning, and it was time the carriage was come.

At that instant they heard it at the door.

Georgie rose, rested her two hands on Winny's shoulders, and kissed her. They said good-bye, not one word more, and then Winny was in the street—in the carriage with the girls, all a-chatter together. And she chatted too, much as usual—they heard no difference; only about half a mile from home she stopt the carriage, and got out, to walk the rest of the way. Clemmy offered to walk with her, but the offer was declined with thanks. Miss Hesketh said she would rather walk alone, she wanted a blow and ten minutes of peace and quietness, to set her up for the lessons that had to be done after tea.

There had been a thick wet mist all day, but now, with the moonrise and a north-west wind, the atmosphere was clearing. Clouds, ragged, huge, yellow, lurid, swept in irregular battalions across the pale sky, and the heavy sway of leafless trees against the low horizon seemed to dwarf the world with their desolateness, and to shut it in. Winny braced herself and marched on, strong and steady, sensible of a change

within and without, but not seeking to define it. The rough gloom of the weather was suggestive of miserable life, of life not to regret leaving—a momentary revelation of despair. And then she thought of her mother, and other people's troubles, and so she arrived at the hall door, and entered into the circle of common light, and the noise of children's tongues, and was gathered back into the round of duties and the work of the hour.

Men and women are chary of bringing sympathy to persons who do not make it manifest that they are very sorry for themselves. They say, and are thankful, that the back is made for the burden, and where there is so little show of grief, the grief cannot be overwhelming. We differ not only in the capacity of feeling, but in our power of expressing it—and we differ also in our force of controlling it. Perhaps, on the whole it is safer to be over-reserved than over-effusive—for how wearisome is a prolonged draught upon that same sympathy we all credit ourselves that we possess! how soon we grow

impatient of easy tears, of fluent complaining, and windy, pitiful sighs, losing faith in their sincerity, and vexing our hearts with simulated compassion for the pretences of customary woe!

Miss Denham rode out in the direction of Hall Green a few days after her interview with Winny Hesketh, in the hope that Winny might turn her steps towards Cotham in that expectation. And it did happen so. They met at what the children called the 'Two Trees,' two immense, bushy chestnuts in the hedgerow, which were the limit of half an hour's smart walking on a winter's day. Thus they reckoned their time for noon-recreation. Winny kept by Georgie's bridle, and the little girls ran on before, bowling their hoops. The friends did not revert to the interest of their previous meeting, and Winny had plenty to say on general subjects, but Georgie was not thereby induced to imagine that she had performed a merely officious action. She understood that her patient had no more present need of special advice. All the effect she discerned

in her was a degree of absence, and once or twice the dropping of a sentence unfinished, as if she had forgotten, or lost the thread of what she meant to say.

When they were about to separate at the gate of Hall Green, Georgie, with a slight suffusion of colour in her face, asked : ' Do you like to see me, Winny ? '

Winny looked up, brightly wondering : ' If I like to see you, Georgie ? What a question ! Certainly, I do ! '

' Then I'll ride this way oftener. It is as good a road in winter as the Holworth road—and winter is beginning early this year.'

' Yes. I wish it were over. I never loved the dreary days,' said Winny. ' Then, good-bye.'

So Miss Denham took her ride twice or thrice a week towards Hall Green, and sometimes she fell in with Miss Hesketh and her pupils, and sometimes she missed them. It was a monotonous, level road, but on a fine morning, when the robins were singing and the sun shone low on the fields, it was pleasant

enough. And their talks by the way—how discursive they were, and to both, how delightful! Georgie had infinite tact. She uttered no personal criticisms on Winny, though she thought many. There was not a word spoken again of that secret which lay between them. Winny always wanted to be informed of what Georgie was reading, writing, dissecting—of her own doings she was not communicative unless questioned, and as it had been ever much more their practice to dilate on Georgie's philosophies than on Winny's inventions, the same thing went on still.

Miss Denham, when she had carefully noted for three or four weeks how her patient bore herself under pain, had no cause to be dissatisfied with what she had ventured, though she could not congratulate herself on having made an absolutely triumphant cure while the sufferer visibly winced from any discussion of it.

CHAPTER VI.

DREAR NOVEMBER DAYS.

IT did not escape the shrewd, circumspect, diligent observation of Mrs Broome, that a change had passed upon her young governess, who was such a treasure. Winny's healthy appetite was somewhat abated, and much against her inclination Mr Broome, who constantly presided at the children's dinner for love of their society, insisted upon a tonic course of strong Edinbro' ale, and when Miss Hesketh eyed the foaming tumbler askance, objecting that she did not like it, and she should fall asleep after it, he compounded for a claret-glass or two, instead, and Clemmy availed herself of the opportunity to emit her spite against Mrs Markham by stating : ' It is of no consequence, papa, if she does fall asleep ; for it is only English history after dinner for Sis and Bee,

and she would hear in a dream if they made a mistake—not in the book.’

‘Clemmy, my dear, you are too clever by half,’ said her elder sister.

Miss Hesketh solemnly averred that she was well—for anything she knew to the contrary—but there must have been some symptom of failure, for one evening she received a severe shock. Mrs Broome came up to the school-room on purpose to remark that the winter was setting in with unusual rigour, and she thought it would be a judicious move if Miss Hesketh descended from her sky-parlour, and took up her night-quarters in a room with Mab. Winny was dreadfully dismayed, and replied with intense decision that she should not like that at all—she must have some silent retreat of her own—she could not live with the children’s noises for ever.

‘You are not required to do so,’ Mrs Broome said, considerably but firmly. ‘There is no fire-place in the tower, and a great volume of cold air must pour down that open chimney. You shall have a small bed put into Mab’s room

—you can keep your sky-parlour, as you call it, for a dressing-room.’

‘I would much rather keep it, and sleep in it altogether,’ urged Winny plaintively.

‘My dear Miss Hesketh, Mr Broome insists upon it,’ rejoined the lady, and immediately conveyed herself beyond the hearing of any further remonstrances. Miss Hesketh had to submit, of course.

When the dancing-days came round now Winny Hesketh never went into Cotham without fearing that Mr Durant might meet her again. If she saw a figure in the distance that resembled his, she turned down another street with throbbing heart and whitened lips. This influence of imagination was lowered after a few occasions, and it seemed likely that the fear and emotion might wear off, but when the event actually occurred the revulsion of feeling was very painful.

It was in the afternoon. She suddenly descried Mr Durant going in the same direction as herself towards Castle Green. Winny knew

more ways than one to her mother's house, and she gained that refuge before he could come in sight of the door. She was flushed with her hurry when she arrived, but sitting by the fire, and with her back to the light, her countenance was hidden in shadow. Her mother noticed nothing strange in either her looks or behaviour ; she only told her it was foolish to walk herself out of breath. Perhaps that was why Winny was so silent this visit. Her mother recollected it after she was gone, when she went over in her own mind the incidents and words of the day, as people who are much alone do.

Winny lingered till the last minute, and longer than she ought to have done, yet not quite long enough to escape the ordeal that she dreaded. Nevertheless, the need to make haste helped her when Mr Durant, coming up from behind, overtook her at Church Corner. They shook hands, and she said she was late, and stepped quickly on. She compelled a smile, and her voice did not betray her, but her colour had vanished, and in her eyes, though she was unconscious of it, there was the troubled ex-

pression of a mind ill at ease. She looked straight forward. Mr Durant went on speaking, but she did not hear, to understand, anything he said until they were parting, when he asked : 'Have you any message this time for your friend, Mildred Hutton ?' Then she answered : 'Only my love to her,' and their eyes met.

Her blithe and bonny face was sad, shy, crest-fallen. It touched him to the quick. 'What has happened ?' he asked, and then was filled with self-reproach for the idle question. He knew very well what had happened.

'Oh, nothing,' said Winny, and with a quick nod, and a sudden illumination as of wonder, she turned and went in at the door of the Talbot, where the children were waiting for her in readiness to start.

Mr Durant had made some excuse to himself for coming to Cotham this second time, which was frivolous and not true—a sign that his conscience did not sanction the indulgence. He came for the pleasure of seeing Miss Hesketh—for nothing but that, unless it were for the pleasure the sight of him would give her.

He felt that she was a little grateful to him for kindnesses received—perhaps, a little more than grateful ; and this was sweet to him. But to-day what a transformation ! All her light-heartedness was gone. If there had been any groundswell of vanity in his thoughts, the rising tide of tenderness swept it away when he saw how she was in pain. He wished she knew how he loved her, how she had charmed him from the first hour of their meeting—if that would do her good, or be any comfort under the tortures of her alarmed pride. And almost he believed it might. He believed that a girl wants a plea before her own modesty for loving a man, and that the only plea which will serve the turn is the confidence that she is but giving like for like ; silently responding to unspoken solicitation.

Winný's sentiments were hardly so sophisticated. She did not reason about her feelings. She had sustained a shock, which, for the nonce, routed her philosophy. She cried herself to sleep that night, for self-reproach, self-pity, anger, shame, for a crowd of pathetic fancies.

She had a very straitened heart, and trembled lest any one should find her out. She was afraid that Miss Denham might hear of this encounter, and mention it. It would not occur again. She assured herself that it was for the last time—almost as if she had a contrary hope. She had tried to be herself, easy, disengaged, but she had grievously failed; and in Mr Durant's gaze of inquiry and surprise, she had read his discovery of her concealed thoughts. Her sole consolation was in the experience she had of his simple kindness, his indulgence of temper—all her desire that he would keep out of her way, that he would not blame her too harshly for a little foolishness, and that he would soon forget it. Her sense of humiliation was very sore, indeed.

Mildred Hutton's letters of this period had but one song—her happy love: and the song had but one burden, the name of Frank. Winny dared inquire nothing of her, and yet she had a longing curiosity to know the history of Mr Durant's marriage. She had to be satisfied, for the present, with the knowledge of the plain

fact, for it did not occur to Mildred to tell her that old story, though she was moved to tell her something else, which, if it was not more salutary, was certainly more soothing. Her placid absorption was stirred for once in a while, and diverted into an alien channel—how deeply stirred Winny guessed from the exertion she made. Mildred wrote her an immense epistle on a Sunday night in her bedroom, when all the house was quiet, to inform her of a conversation, and a confession that she had received from Mr Durant in the afternoon.

The confession had not been formally made. Between his visit to Cotham and that Sunday afternoon three days had elapsed, during which Mr Durant had remembered often, and ever more tenderly, Miss Hesketh's forlorn little effort to look at him unconcerned. It did cross his mind once, and even twice, that he might not be the author of her dejection—there might be other causes, many other causes—but still the conviction remained that he had laid himself out to promote her enjoyment, and had done his best to make her glad

and happy in his company. This; which she called kindness, had in it a strain of cruelty. He was not free to win her affections; a slight preference was all he courted,—so he said to himself, and while he said it, he knew that he had desired much more than that, and had succeeded quite beyond his deserts. He was triumphant, and he was pitiful—he was very restless and distressed until he had found out a way of disburthening his conscience, and, as he hoped, of administering consolation.

‘I was in Cotham on Wednesday, and there I met that sweet little woman, Miss Hesketh,’ he said to Mildred Hutton as indifferently as he was able.

‘She is a sweet little woman,’ Mildred replied. ‘And what had she to tell you?’

‘Nothing. She seemed tired, and out of spirits, I thought. She was gayer here.’

‘Winny would be as gay as any of us if her life did not fetter her. She is bound to behave as if she were a hundred, or nobody would have her for a governess. I wish she were out of bondage.’

Suddenly there flashed into Mildred's memory that remark of her mother upon Durant and her friend, and she glanced in his face with a shrewd penetration. His eyes met hers: 'I wish I were out of bondage, too,' said he. 'I never saw the woman yet with whom it would be easier to live pleasant than with her.'

Mildred was silent for a minute after this, and then, with a sigh and an air of pensive abstraction, she cried softly: 'Ah, but wishing will not release you!' She was comparing her own fate with Winny's. She perfectly understood what Durant meant her to understand, without fuller expression of it, and now she feared that her mother had seen truer than herself when she gave warning of the peril to her friend of the close intimacy which had grown up between her and the master of Rushmead. But she knew too well what loyalty to her sex required to admit that any such peril existed. She had been familiar with Durant as an elder friend of her brother since she was herself a child, and that he should be dangerous to Winny Hesketh's

peace (a man of double her years!) was difficult to realise; but, nevertheless, such a thing might be. Winny had come to Foston unforewarned, and, therefore, unforearmed; Durant had been assiduously good to her, and she had the partiality of a reserved and quiet character for people older than herself. Still Mildred smiled with a half incredulity at the notion of Winny in love, and speaking upon it, she said: 'If my friend has made a capture of you, I am sorry—she is very dear and sweet, but not over susceptible—which is lucky, if you tried your fascinations upon her. I should have interfered had I imagined any risk—but I know her invulnerable little heart.'

In making this assertion Mildred rather overdid her part. It was sufficient to provoke Durant to exert his fascinations further—until he had ascertained, beyond denial, how unfair and false it was. He did experience a momentary pique, but he talked no more of Miss Hesketh—he had talked enough for his purpose. He did not want assuring that she had a kindness for him (he was able to judge

of that for himself), but he wanted her to be assured that he had a mighty tenderness for her, a love strong and manifest enough to be all the excuse she needed if her own pride arraigned her for giving him a place in her maiden meditations. He expected that the nature of feminine friendship would demand a full, free, and early communication of every word that he had uttered, and every sentiment he had implied, and in this he was not deceived. When Mildred betook herself to reflection on what he had confessed, her heart warmed with sympathy—she laughed, indeed; but sympathy is not always inconsistent with a perception of the ludicrous. Mildred was accustomed to view Durant as almost getting into years (she supposed he was forty), and Winny, on the other hand, seemed to her very young, immature, and childlike, and though lovable, a trifle ridiculous, clothed with the grave responsibility of her state of life.

She did not contemplate the business as serious. It was an interesting speculation how far Winny might have responded to Durant's

affection, and Mildred would have liked to know. The first issue of her curiosity was that long letter, written when the world was asleep, which brought such magical cure to the misery of her friend, that almost Winny forgave herself her own betrayal. But the betrayal went no further. What Durant knew, he knew. What Mildred conjectured might remain uncertain. She would tell her nothing, and keep her counsel by silence and absence. This was not an adequate return for the effusive comfort that had been given her, and Winny felt that it was not. But if ever stratagem be excusable, it is in the concealment of a passion that must be nipped in the bud. Winny's heart sang for joy when she read how Durant loved her ('He is as fond of you almost as I am,' Mildred wrote), because that took the sting out of her foolishness, and restored her right to self-respect, without diminishing the love that was so foolish. She did not consider whether he was suffering—the idea did not enter her mind; there is no shame to a man for loving unwisely.

She did not answer Mildred's letter for a

week. In the use of her pen she had an advantage. She had been made fun of at Foston for praising Mr Durant's kindness, which some people thought mere pleasing of himself, and she chose to praise it now—'Mr Durant is very kind; he pays me a fine compliment'—not a word more.

Mildred cried out: 'Oh, she is quite safe! He need not flatter himself—she is no more in love with him than I am.'

Winnie was safe, no doubt; but Mildred's conclusion was not absolutely just for all that.

She took the first opportunity of informing Mr Durant that Miss Hesketh was in excellent spirits again—she had written to inquire. 'And I told her the fine compliment you paid her—she says you are *very kind*,'—she added with a dryness that was rather disconcerting.

In fact, Mildred had arrived at an opinion that Durant was presumptuous in his visions of her friend, and ought to be humbled. If he had been free she was far from sure that his suit would have had her approval.

Nevertheless, as his conceited aspirations were most unlikely to be fulfilled, she could afford to pity him; and she did pity him—a little; but she laughed at him a little too. And thus, if he had erred through idleness and vanity, Winny was, in part, avenged, only she did not know it, and his brief discomfiture was soon forgotten.

The children at Hall Green had no Christmas holidays, but the dancing-class broke up for a month, and the journeys to Cotham were interrupted. Winny Hesketh had given Miss Denham notice of this, and Georgie had answered that she also was going to spend Christmas away from home. They were to have had a last meeting at the Two Trees on a certain noonday in December, but though Winny was there (for it must be bad weather, indeed, to keep the children indoors), Georgie did not come. It had been raining and sleeting all the morning, and though it cleared at twelve, it was too late then for her to set out. That was her

excuse. But she wrote to Winny a letter by the next post, with an impertinent little apologue of 'A Moth and a Candle,' to bid her take care of herself, play at ball, and walk out every day. Winny blushed with vexation over the impertinent little apologue. It was Georgie's way of apprising her that she had heard of her meeting with Mr Durant. Georgie, on her own behalf, announced that she was going to pay a visit to London, and hoped to proceed afterwards to Paris, with a view to her studies. If she were successful according to her expectations, the time of her return to Cotham was uncertain.

Winny was very sorry to lose Georgie for this indefinite term. She saw a vista of unrelieved days before her stretching far, far. At twenty philosophy is no match for disappointed dreams of love. Winny had the wit to know that her mood was a terminable mood, and signified a loss of sweet hopes to ruminate upon, but her heart refused submission to the reasonable logic of her head. She had not

learned to work the rules in proportion which a variety of troubles teaches us all in time, and she averted her mind from the inevitable brightening that must ensue, to indulge in gentle melancholy.

CHAPTER VII.

OTHER PEOPLE'S TROUBLES.

WINNY HESKETH did not know when she was well off. She was ungrateful, and she got punished for it.

She made a good fight to be herself through her trial, and almost she succeeded. Almost, but not quite. For when the boys came home from school and from college, she found the irregularities they introduced into the school-room too much for her nerves, and often forsook it altogether for her shivery eyrie in the tower, where she was understood, on Clemmy's report, to be busy writing, in crimson spun-silk mittens bought at the Quaker's shop in Cotham. Mr and Mrs Broome were not sure that they approved of so much writing. Then she had become a silent character, and Sis did not like

to ask her to tell them tales after tea of when she was a little girl, because, pouted Sis, laying a soft cheek up against Winny's, and clasping her uncomfortably round the neck: 'Ou look like a dog that has lost its master'—which Winny blushed at as too shrewd a speculation, and Clemmy rebuked as extremely rude.

The rule and regimen of lessons was relaxed during Christmas week, and on a suggestion of Mr Broome that the governess might be spared for a little while, the mother of the children proposed to her a three days' visit home. Winny thankfully accepted the short furlough, and Mrs Broome conveyed her into Cotham—they two alone in the carriage. On the road Miss Hesketh had to smile and offer congratulations on family intelligence. Dear Mab, her mother said, had won the affections of a cousin during their last summer's visit to Scotland, and there was a hopeful prospect of her marriage in the spring. When this had been duly discussed, Mrs Broome mentioned further that dear Clemmy was so ambitious of a high education that her papa had all but con-

sented to let her go to London as a student at Queen's College.

'And in that event, Miss Hesketh, we shall have to make a change at Hall Green. Dear little Bee and Sis must do with a less expensive governess' (Winny had forty guineas of salary this year), 'and Mr Broome and myself have decided that your engagement had, therefore, better terminate at Easter. That will give you three months to seek another. We shall regret parting with you.'

Winny did not hear any more distinctly—the blood had rushed to her head, was buzzing in her ears. No later than last night she had mused of herself pathetically as a sad, lonely mortal, indeed; but here was a blow—most unexpected, most severe; and, withal, so inevitable in her vocation, that she secretly acknowledged her folly in fancying she had seen already the worst of her life. Oh, life must have yet many shapes and degrees of trial in store for her before she would have done with it! Mrs Broome talked on amiably, and was in excellent spirits, because of dear Mab. Miss Hesketh was glad to

escape from her when the carriage drove up to the Talbot; glad, also, to walk the remainder of the way to Castle Green, that she might bring her face and feelings under control before meeting her mother.

It was Christmas Eve, and nearly five o'clock—dark in the streets, therefore, except for the lamps and the seasonably decorated shop-windows. Winny lingered along them in melancholy mood, and when she came into the comparative gloom of Castle Green, she lingered yet more reluctantly. Once she stood still, and gazed at the lights reflected tremulously in the pale, full-flowing river. She wished that she had better news, or none, to carry home to her mother. It had dejected herself, and was too recent to be thrown off. As she stood thus pensively pondering, a sturdy young woman enveloped in a cloak and hood passed her, glanced round, halted with a keen, inquisitive air, and came back. It was Delphine Mercier.

‘I thought it was your figure, Winny Hesketh, and yet I did not believe it could be you!’

cried she, laying a hand on her comrade's arm. 'Why so tragical? What are you dreaming of? What are you doing here by the water-side?'

'I am on my way from the Talbot to my mother's house. I have three days' holiday,' answered Winny, and was herself again.

'I was just going there to beg a cup of tea. I have promised to play a game of chess with Mrs Mason to-night. You have heard how ill she is? No? Ah, but she is—cancer. Dreadful! I contrive to go in of an evening two or three times a week to play chess, the only thing that amuses her. And your mother gives me a cup of tea first.'

'Walk slowly, Delphine. I have something to tell you.' And Winny poured out her trouble of to-day.

'I should not let that vex me! You must have sixty guineas where you go next,' was Delphine's cool, common-sensical reply.

'I don't care for the money. I love the children, and I don't love strangers. I am sorry I have to leave Hall Green. I wish my

mother would let me live at home, and go out as you do. But I am afraid she never will.'

'I am sure she never will—she has too much pride to see you scudding about the town, rain or fair weather. And it is nonsense to say you don't care for the money—you ought to care. The more you cost, the more will you be valued.'

'I think I shall not tell my mother, at present. She would only fret herself with anxiety where I shall drift next.'

'I never tell mine any of my worries about pupils—but I advise you to mention your intended change as soon as you can do so without showing that it bothers yourself. And let Mrs Brunton know. She is in the way of finding situations.'

Winnie felt her spirits mending even as Delphine spoke. They were now at the widow Hesketh's door. Susan opened it, and her loud, pleased exclamation of surprise brought her mistress from the front-parlour, where she was resting in the firelight, and

musings of many things when the door-bell rang. She began to say: 'Dear Winny, is it you? I was just thinking that you might as well be here on Christmas Day as not! And Delphine Mercier? Come in, children, you are cold. Tea is on the table—and Susan, bring the cake.' The mother's eyes had a trick of shining with tears now at every emotion—it was like the weakness of old age. But they cleared quickly, and she untied Winny's bonnet, and kissed her, and remarked that she was looking nicely, and the frost had pinched her cheeks. Winny was obliged to the frost for making her rosy.

There was a cheerful noise at tea with the two young people, but Delphine Mercier had to go soon. She found, however, a private moment to make a communication to Winny in answer to her query: 'About your wedding, Delphine, when is it to be?'

'It is put off, Winny—I don't quite know when it will be. You see, I have my trouble too. Dr Archer read me a lecture the other day on my duty to mamma—that I ought to

live single to maintain her, because she wishes it. I plead that we *will* maintain her, Joe and I. If we are both teaching we shall need a housekeeper, and who so fit as mamma? But she objects to relinquish her own home. Even more decidedly do I object to give up Joe. We will await a turn in events, but we mean to exercise a judicious selfishness in the end.'

Her mother told Winny afterwards that Mrs Mercier's opposition to her daughter's marriage had other grounds than her simple objection to give up her home in Cotham. She considered the prospect of comfort in it very limited, and that everything would depend upon Delphine's exertions. 'If Delphine's case were yours, Winny, I should certainly refuse my consent,' said the widow with decision. 'I have no notion of an indolent man marrying a girl in the expectation of being supported by her. It ought to be the other way. I feel with Mrs Mercier that Delphine is more hasty than wise.'

Winny said nothing. She sat in the old

rocking-chair, leaning down towards the fire, and gazing abstractedly into the scarlet hollows where she used to see pictures when she was a child. To judge from her countenance the pictures she saw to-night were rather dismal, though her eyes were bright and her lips softly folded. Two lines, two incipient wrinkles, disturbed the calm of her brow with a premature thoughtfulness. Her mother gave her news of their friends. Mr Knox was ill, Mrs Fleetwood was very asthmatic. Miss Baxter was suffering much from rheumatism this winter, and Miss Maria, being overdone with care and anxiety, was more snappish than ever. Aunt Agnes wrote from London that Dick had changed his lodgings (Dick had left his uncle's house and office over a year ago), and was too far off now to dine with them on Sundays. His uncle did not know how he was going on—but he was afraid not too steadily or prosperously.

‘There is a letter from him—you can read it, Winny,’ and the widow produced her son's letter from the basket where her knitting lived—the knitting that was still for Dick.

Dick's letter was a begging-letter for money. Winny read it with confusion of face. They knew very little at home of Dick's doings—only they knew he was not to boast of.

'I have nothing to spare—nothing to send him,' said his mother quietly and coldly. Winny reddened, and thought she would send him five pounds. The widow proceeded: 'Mr Nicholls cannot afford to pay the guinea a week for his rooms now, and rather than let him leave, I have lowered his rent to fifteen shillings. And I do not know how long he may be able to continue that. There is no chance of his resuming duty anywhere. He is in a lingering decline. Dr Archer comes every day to see him as a friend.'

Winny pulled herself together with an instant revival of energy and courage. It was necessary to show a brave face to such a battalion of woes. 'I have twenty-one pounds that Mr Broome paid me this morning, mother. Dick shall have five of it, and the rest is at your service to do what you like with,'

said she, producing her russia-leather purse with business-like alacrity.

‘I should not dream of touching your money, thank you, Winny,’ replied her mother gravely.

‘I am sure you would not unless in case of necessity. But I need nothing myself, at present, so you can take the fifteen pounds, and put it in the bank. It will be there if you want it. Don’t let Mr Nicholls leave because of the rent.’

‘No—you are very good, Winny. You must do as you please about Dick, but your Uncle Hayland does not advise me to begin sending him little helps. He advises leaving him to find out what caprice and idleness bring a man to, in the hope that, as he loves his comforts, he may come to see that it is pleasanter to work for them than to go without.’

‘This *once*—it is Christmas,’ said Winny. And then turned the subject by asking if there was a pair of scales in the house; she wanted a parcel weighed for the post.

Susan was rung for to bring the small copper

scales from the kitchen, and Winny introduced her parcel, ready sealed, and addressed to that famous writer (conductor now of a popular magazine), upon whose works she had sat when she was a little girl, to secure her right to the first reading when she had spoken before Dick. Her mother put on her spectacles, and deliberately enunciated the direction aloud. Then she weighed the parcel, reckoned up the postage at six shillings and fourpence, and rather sarcastically remarked that it was very wasteful, and Winny was very venturesome.

‘Well, mother, nothing venture, nothing have,’ retorted Winny.

‘I prefer to see you a good governess. I have no wish to see you an authoress,’ rejoined her mother. ‘An authoress, indeed!’

‘A good governess—to be shuffled about the world for forty or fifty years, and cast aside when I am good for nothing!—No, I’ll make a dash for a better fate than old Mam’zell’s!—I am to leave Hall Green at Easter—Mab is going to be married; Clemmy is going to school.—There, you see, mother, what certainty

has a governess? I have been happy at Hall Green—perhaps, my next home will be just the reverse.'

Winnie announced her news with a defiant vivacity that disguised its character. The widow said she was sorry to hear it, but she caught the infection of Winnie's spirit, and added that she must hope for the best.—Then they were silent. Winnie wrote a rapid letter to Dick, enclosed him a bank-note, asked for an acknowledgment by return, and called for Susan to go and get it registered, and to post that other momentous parcel before the office closed. Her promptitude kept her mother quiet. She did not even offer a remonstrance when Winnie, lifting the window-blind, mentioned that it was a fine frosty, moonlight night, and she would run to the post herself with Susan.

Winnie was relieved to have got the telling of her news so well over. It was a load off her mind. She and Susan made a quick despatch of their errand to the post-office, and then returned towards home more leisurely. Many

people were in the streets admiring the gay shops—a cheap show for the poor. Winny Hesketh had never seen it before, or them either, in the same light. ‘I wish I were rich enough to make them all happy!’ she said with a prodigious longing.

‘Try *one*, Miss Winny,’ suggested Susan. ‘A shilling will do it, for a plum-loaf.’

Winny welcomed the idea, and they went on scrutinising the groups and single figures until they came to a party of five little children, the eldest being of the age of ten, or thereabouts. They were contemplating with serious, wondering delight the grand Christmas-tree, hung with gilded and coloured crackers, in the plate-glass window of a crowded grocer’s shop. Susan entered the shop, and amazed them with the gift of an orange apiece; then asked if they all belonged to one family, and if their mother was a widow. Of course, she was, and they were all brothers and sisters—so Winny, at a baker’s close by, bought a big plum-loaf, and endowed the children with that, who stared, as

well they might, at such surprising, bounteous luck.

‘Poor bairns, how clean they are, Miss Winny—did you notice?’ Susan asked her young mistress as they proceeded on their way. ‘They reminded me of ourselves—we were six little ’uns when my father died, and Lottie was the baby; six at home, for we were seven altogether, but my eldest sister was with my aunt at Manchester. Mother says I can’t remember, but I can; I can recollect getting ready to go, and it was dark. And we all cried so—mother too. But she said it had to be.’

‘To go where, Susan?’ Winny interrupted.

‘For one-and-twenty days, to be sworn to our parish—to the Union, Miss Winny. I don’t like to speak the word, but so it was. Father had worked since before he was married with Squire Melmoth of Rossall, and mother would have it we belonged to Rossall parish, but they hadn’t many poor there, and they said we belonged to Bollan. And we had to go

to the Union till it was settled. I remember having clogs and a blue striped frock put on, and I was so 'shamed of walking to church in them; I kept my head down for fear of seeing anybody as knew us. For while father was alive we were quite respectable, and had a nice house and a garden—it seems to me it was a large garden; and a pig—but Squire Melmoth wouldn't let no widows stay in his cottages, and it was a very poor place we got at Bollan—they made it out we belonged to Bollan; but mother always says we belonged by rights to Rossall, and we went to Rossall school. Miss Melmoths paid the pence, and I often wondered why they could not pay to Bollan instead of having us to walk all that long way in winter. It was over two miles, and we took our dinners with us—bread and treacle it was; and mother strove hard. Her dinner was bread and treacle too, many a day, and a sup of cold tea in a bottle; she worked in the gardens at Rossall for all we lived at Bollan. She tried washing, but the doctor said her health wouldn't stand it.'

'But about the Union, Susan—was it a very

dreadful place?' Winny Hesketh inquired. 'Were you very miserable there?'

'The worst was that we never saw mother unless we could get near her in the hall where we had our meals—men, women and children together. She could not keep us all when father was dead without the parish allowance—that was why we had to go in; but she told us it would not be very long, for they'd be glad to be shut of such a lot as we were. And she could work, and did work when we came out. They kept us the one-and-twenty days, and then we were let go—my eldest brother who was getting on for twelve, managed to run away before to a farmer that he'd tented for. How did they use us? Not badly—I don't mind that anybody ever hit me. But I was sad and hungry—I was but a little 'un, only five when father died, and Tom and Lottie younger. For breakfast and tea we had milk and water lithed with flour—*skilly*; I don't suppose you've heard the name, Miss Winny—scalding hot, and ten minutes to get it; and if we hadn't done when the man rapped with his spoon, we had

to leave off. And we hadn't to speak. One dinner was broth and dumpling—I couldn't eat the dumpling, and if I could spy mother, I used to creep up, and twitch her sleeve, and ask: "Is it *pinning*-day, mother, to-day?" She's told me often since, how I used to twitch her, and whisper: "Is it *pinning*-day, mother, to-day?" I'm always sorry for bairns if they're hungered. Hunger's a sharp thorn, Miss Winny.'

Winny believed her, and was touched by her reminiscences. Susan continued to open her heart and her memory.

'When we lived at home after, and grumbled, as children will, at what mother gave us to eat, she'd say, if we didn't like it, we could go to the Union, and have skilly—*that* made us hold our tongues! I remember a girl with pretty light hair, who had a little sister: they always sat on the ground cuddled in each other's arms. The eldest—I should think she would be eleven—told us their mother had gone away with another man (I didn't know what that meant then), and

their father had gone to seek her, and they'd been sent to the Union. We left 'em there when we came out. I never saw 'em after, or heard what 'came of 'em. I've often thought since how much worse they was off than us —with mother.'

'Other people's troubles are a lesson to bear our own, Susie,' Winny said.

'They ought to be, Miss Winny, but our own feels to lie heaviest at the time. I always say nobody can go far wrong in giving a mite to widows and fatherless bairns; for let 'em strive ever so, they'll have less than enough while they are little. I speak what I know —My mother and yours, Miss Winny, has been a good sample, but they've looked to One above, and have been helped, as well as helpers of themselves.'

Here Susan fell silent. They were coming round the corner under the wall of St Stephen Martyr's. The gravestones faced the moonlight, standing erect, and awry and low-sunken amongst the crowded mounds, all whitened with the hoarfrost. Winny Hesketh paused to look

through the iron gate which was ajar, and said :
' My father is buried here—I cannot remember him.'

' Mine lies in Rossall churchyard,' said Susan.

There were rough steps and voices in the old porch, and suddenly the bells in the tower above, clanged and swung, then dropt into a sweet, regular chime, familiar to Winny ever since she was born. ' I do love the Christmas bells, and there will be the carol-singers at midnight,' she said, and they lingered, listening to the peal that triumphed high in the air.

As they went on again presently Susan with fervour remarked : ' I am downright glad, Miss Winny, you're come home for Christmas Day. Last year, and the year before, it was not like Christmas, mistress and me alone by our two selves.'

Winny was glad too—especially when her mother lifted up her face with a placid content upon it as she entered the parlour, and announced that her letter and parcel were

started, safe and fair, upon their road to London.

‘Don’t be so sanguine, Winny, and you will feel the disappointment less when it comes,’ said the widow warningly.

Winny persisted in her show of good-humour, though, no doubt, she experienced a chill. Life would have seemed easier, on the whole, if her mother had believed in her—had believed, that is, in the possible success of her tentative efforts in literature instead of being so calmly resigned to the anticipation of her defeat.

Winny Hesketh had, indeed, somewhat to reflect on this Christmas Eve, though she had also the buoyancy which gets the better of depressing reflections. It could not have profited her to foresee that whatever she was minded to do in the future would have to be done in her own strength, and that the encouragement which flows from the manifest faith and interest of dear and near belongings would be wanting. She caught a glimpse of it in her mother’s indifference, but shut her

eyes to it. This aspect of the world was not enticing. But on the other side there was necessity. Work she must, and it appeared her indisputable right to choose the work she liked best. If her mother had a preference, so had she a preference. And she had not been trained to self-dependence for nothing. She had drawn from late and present events the inevitable conclusion that for her self-dependence would prove no fiction, but a real and permanent state of life. Three months hence she must be provided with a fresh sphere of teaching, or be at a loss. It was good, then, to furnish a second string to her bow—thus she described to herself that inventing and scribbling of which her mother did not try to conceal her disapproval—she called it a second string to her bow. Her determination to persevere was not relaxed, but her hope in persevering was abated. However, she knew it was no uncommon lot for prophets to be despised in their own country—which exaggerated similitude, applied

to the consolation of her insignificant self, brought a smile to her lips that even expanded into an audible laugh.

‘What makes you merry, Winny?’ her mother asked, peering through her spectacles at the young face addressed to the fire.

‘My own thoughts. The comic side of myself that I cannot help seeing,’ replied Winny, and rose abruptly, and went to the window.

‘You are happy who can laugh at yourself!’ Her mother fancied, but could not be sure, that she had gone to look out at the moonlight to hide a rush of tears as sudden as her laughter. When Winny was tired or overstrained she was liable to these capricious humours, which were best left unnoticed.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT HOME FOR CHRISTMAS.

SINCE Winny Hesketh became her own mistress her mother had prepared her a little chamber to herself, with painted walls, a white bed; and all things suitable and according. The window-seat supplied her indispensable need of a writing-table, and there was a hanging shelf for books. This was Winny's castle. It was high up in the roof, but she did not mind stairs then-a-days.

When she had said 'good-night' to her mother, Susan asked if she would like to be awakened when the carol-singers came at midnight. 'Trust me for waking,' said Winny. In fact, she did not offer herself to sleep; she had ever so much thinking to do. She wrapped herself warmly, and sat at the window, with the blind up, contemplating the sky, where the

moon rode in cloudless effulgence, and the fields across the river, silvered with frosty brightness. The bells had ceased, and St Stephen's bulked vast in the depth of its shadows and wan distinctness of its broad lights at the corner of Castle Green. The town was quiet now—so quiet that a footstep on the stones was heard from a long way off, echoing as it approached or retired.

There was nothing to distract Winny Hesketh from her meditations. In her closet she was less cheerful than before witnesses. She put off her cheerfulness as we put off a garment assumed for an occasion, and let herself go, as it were, to rest after a prolonged effort. Her sense of perfect aloneness was accompanied with a sense of relief. Her troubles never descended upon her with perturbation; they brought a stillness of spirit rather, and she had been visited by none yet that passion had magnified out of just shape and proportion. She could even treat them in order.

She considered first the calamity of the day—she esteemed it nothing short of a calamity

that she had a new home to seek at Easter. Then came in sequence the recollection that a governess's life is naturally broken in pieces by such seekings, and unless she have unusual luck and pluck so it runs all away. For this, if for nothing else, she had constantly affirmed that she would not adhere to it beyond that age of thirty years which old Mam'zell had named as the date of liberty with propriety. She re-affirmed the same to-night, accompanied by speculations on the strength and elasticity of that second string to her bow. Her mother had bidden her not be too sanguine—but her temper was not of the most sanguine type. She could face her troubles with some courage, but she had no vision of miracles turning up to disperse them. She had a very clear perception, indeed, that they had to be lived through, and with composure.

Not for the world would she have had any one conjecture from her behaviour that she entertained an abiding regret because of Mr Durant. She did not avert her heart from his remembrance, but what she dwelt upon was

only what she knew—how he had looked, spoken, been to her so kind. She was not sorry that she had known him—would not have given away her inarticulate pain for any ease that could have been offered to her. At present, she imagined that she would rather not see him again ; not until she had quite conquered the emotions that rose in her when she recalled his face, his voice, his air, his ways, manly and indulgent, yet imperative and firm. Oh, how good, how tender would such a man be to the woman he loved !

That thought would not bear caressing. Winny bade it avaunt. If it did not go at one bidding, or if it recurred, more was the pity ! Mildred Hutton's letter had given it a manner of licence—that letter was not altogether wise, and Winny cherished it as her most precious treasure. It was her plea for herself when she mused over Mildred's prediction, and half allowed, half denied, that she had fallen in love perversely. But there was no anger, no remorse, and small shame attendant on the fall-

ing, and she would not sink deeper in for wanton weakness.

Long ago, in the 'Spectator,' that inexhaustible manual of worldly experience, Winny had read that a disappointment in love is the worst of all disappointments to get over. If she had been charged with suffering this disappointment, she would have scouted the accusation indignantly. She told herself—and with much truth—that she only *liked* Mr Durant : well, *loved* him, perhaps, a *little* ; for love varies in degree as it differs in kind, and she was sure that her power of lovingness was far beyond the feeling that he had unintentionally evoked. Love him ? how could she love him when he had never spoken to her of love ? She did not blame him—she was not unhappy at all ; it was just her fancy, her folly. Nevertheless, a few smarting tears came with that positive self-convincement.

With weariness and drowsiness these musings slipped away, and when the carol-singers had been and gone, Winny lay down and slept healthfully. There was not much

sting in her sorrows, and there was much vigour and resistance in her character.

Winnie Hesketh awoke on Christmas-day morning feeling as if she had no substantial troubles at all. The sun was shining, and her mother met her with animation. They went to church together, and Winnie had a word of greeting from various friends and acquaintances who all flattered her that she looked blooming. Even Aunt Agnes would have been satisfied now with her country niece's style of dress—a style that was like herself. She wore to-day a Limerick red cloak in the Irish fashion, a dress of fine grey merino, and a velvet-bonnet of the same neutral tint, with a curl of carnation feather, and all round her face a tulle quilling with loops of white satin and a big bow under her chin. When her mother looked at her in church she thought what a pretty young creature her Winnie was.

Somebody else thought so too. That was Mr Durant in the gallery. Winnie did not see him to begin with. She sat above her mother

in the pew where she used to sit to be separated from Dick when they were children. Her countenance was peaceful. Her eyes were not on her book (indeed, it was shut for the most part), but neither did they rove so much as Aunt Agnes had once remarked. They were tranquil and abstracted. It is to be feared that Winny still gave way to wandering thoughts.

Old Mr Musty had died gradually out of the pulpit some years ago, and had been succeeded by a gentleman of family and estate, who kept a curate, and was known to the widow Hesketh only on Sundays and the greater Church festivals. There had been no religious revival in Cotham yet, and it could not be objected that the ecclesiastical practices at St Stephen Martyr's savoured of Popery. The service was relieved by the singing of two psalms only. Brevity and despatch were the reigning incumbent's motto, and though the sacred edifice was adorned with holly-boughs for Christmas, neither taste nor labour had been engaged in producing artistic effects.

The sexton and the clerk, and the charwoman who cleaned the church, had done it.

Mr Durant had the advantage of one ample bunch of prickly winter-green to shield him from public view. He did not wish to be noticed by Miss Hesketh. He felt a forbidden pleasure in watching her unsuspected. To enjoy that pleasure he had come to Cotham twice or thrice before, and had missed it deservedly. It was a yielding to inclination which he excused as lawful anxiety to judge for himself how that sweet-eyed little woman got on. He felt very tender for her, had not meant to harm her, yet feared that he was somehow worthy of condemnation. Mrs Hutton the elder had shaken her head at him, and said his kindness to that girl was cruel kindness, and he ought to repent in dust and ashes. He was not repenting at this moment. He was amused by the perfect serenity and unconsciousness of Miss Hesketh's visage. It betrayed no grieving that he should repent. It prompted him rather to be satisfied and glad.

While he was thinking this thought Winny lifted her eyes straight to his face, as if she had known that he was there. The tip of flame in her bonnet did not burn more vividly than her cheeks as she met his gaze resting upon her. She looked up no more during either psalm or sermon, and what her face said now he was perplexed to read—she had not appeared so devout that she could complain he had disturbed her devotions.

In the church porch he waited for her coming out: waited, if the occasion had been good, with exemplary patience, for the north wind blew in from the river, keen and cutting. But presently the door was shut, and he had not seen her—he supposed she must have gone out by another way. In fact, Winny had stayed with her mother for the Communion, and at the second leaving of the congregation he had disappeared.

After that incident Winny Hesketh had not two opinions of whether she might or might not be right and safe in meeting Mr Durant. She crushed her poor little hands together, and said

to herself with a bitterer pain in her heart, and hotter tears in her eyes: 'I must not see him ever again if I can help it—I must avoid seeing him or I shall be miserable.' And she proved her sincerity by keeping indoors the remainder of that day and all the next, while she supposed him to be about the town. This did not surprise her mother because snow began to fall in the afternoon, and the next morning lay so deep that there could be no walking with pleasure. And when the carriage arrived on the third day to convey her back to Hall Green she returned to her duties with a sense of escape.

CHAPTER IX.

A WILL OF HER OWN.

THE weeks that intervened before Easter seemed to glide by more swiftly than any previous weeks in all Winny Hesketh's life. Yet they were not unmarked by incidents and episodes.

The first was a singular surprise. One morning the post brought her a letter from little Myra of her Manor School days, and a jeweller's box, containing a gold watch with an inscription to her from the donor. Winny read the letter between laughing and crying. Myra had ceased to be little Myra a good while ago, and wrote of herself as having outgrown her strength, and being an immensely tall rail of a delicate young woman. She was an orphan of fortune, as, perhaps, Miss Winifred knew, and she wished to offer her this remem-

brance, which she did with the approval of her guardians. Winny was much pleased, was very grateful; it was a beautiful watch, a valuable gift. She wrote back a letter of warm thanks, and news of old companions that she thought Myra would like to hear. It seemed but a very short while after, that Myra closed her great blue eyes on this world. In fact, Winny had no second letter from her.

Another incident. In February Winny had tidings of that parcel of manuscript which she had sent to London on Christmas Eve—in a letter from the great editor himself, which made her spirits go up amazingly. He gave her praise and encouragement that she was shy of believing, and he invited her to become one of his contributors. Her story had impressed him profoundly; it was too long for his purpose, but he would undertake to find her a publisher for it.

‘What will my mother—what will Georgie say!’ was Winny’s first reflection; and she determined to reserve her news for the triumph of a personal communication.

A few days later she despatched to London some photographic country-sketches, and the volume went to a publisher. In the following month she received one of her sketches in print, and immediately after a cheque for six guineas—the first-fruits of her scribbling. She turned it into gold and silver, and the next time she went into Cotham she carried it to show to Georgie. When she showed it to her mother, that obstinate woman would only reiterate her desire that Winny should continue a good governess and let writing alone, and she felt her need of warmer sympathy.

Miss Denham had returned from Paris only a few days before, and welcomed her comrade with a lively effusion of talk on her own studies which were succeeding entirely as she would have them. Winny listened, and the clock ran on. At length there was a pause, and she drew out her purse, concerning which Georgie remarked that she wanted a new one.

‘I have a better for display—this is for service,’ replied Winny, and extracting the sovereigns

and the shillings, she arranged them upon the table in a neat device. 'Fairy-money. Out of my own head, Georgie. Can I gratify you with a small present in any shape? I am going to spend all that in buying myself pleasures,' said she consequentially.

'Have you lost your wits, Winny? What do you mean?'

'I hope not, for I have just begun to find out what they are worth. This is pay for pen-work.'

Georgie coloured with astonishment, was congratulatory, and asked questions on her own account. Winny gave the fullest answers she was able, but contented herself with exhibiting the pence, and kept the praise in her pocket. They reverted to scientific discourse. Apparently the success of one scribbler would provoke the emulation of another. Winny's triumph fell rather flat. Georgie was glad for her friend, and was immediately filled with projects of her own.

The lavish manner in which Winny spent those six guineas alarmed her mother, who

said it was exactly her poor father's way. Winny persisted all the same—bought Georgie a book that she had expressed a wish to possess, and Mildred Hutton a wedding-present of Bohemian glass. Susan got a new cap and Nanny Anson half-a-crown, and what was left went to purchase things for the widow Hesketh's table, which had been for years in use and fashion elsewhere, but which her means had never yet compassed. 'And now, Winny, having got rid of all your fairy-money, I suppose you feel contented?' said her mother. And Winny said, 'Yes. Perfectly,' with an air most provoking.

The next event was a proposal from the publisher to give twenty guineas for the copyright of that story which had impressed the famous editor. Winny accepted it with thanks. It seemed to her a very handsome sum for what had cost her so little pains; and she took the opportunity of intimating to her incredulous mother that her scribbling was not mere waste paper, according to the commercial maxim that the worth of anything is just as much as

it will bring. The widow Hesketh, if convinced at all, was convinced against her will. She gazed through her spectacles at the cheque, and said she would put it in the bank—the bank gave interest at two and a half per cent.

‘The pounds. I want the shillings to make ducks and drakes of,’ exclaimed Winny forcibly.

Her mother looked up with grave remonstrance: “Wilful waste makes woeful want.” You may live to need it,’ said she.

‘Avarice is the vice of old age. I cannot cultivate that and the joys of youth too. The shillings, mother, the shillings! That is my principle.’ And before the too-prudent widow was permitted to deposit the cheque in her cash-box, she had to dole out the silver to her resolute daughter.

‘Self-willed you always were, and self-willed you will be to the end of the chapter,’ said she, counting the coins reluctantly into Winny’s rosy palm. She did not know

whether to be pleased or vexed with her.

‘My dear mother, a woman who earns her own living is entitled to have a will of her own,’ was Winny’s rejoinder.

The widow Hesketh was a reasonable person. This independence was what she had brought her child up to, and she had no right to complain if she did not find it altogether agreeable. She reflected upon it much more than she expressed, and she began to discern that Winny had a very strong streak of her father in her, which circumstances would develop.

Mrs Brunton had been apprised that Miss Hesketh was leaving Hall Green at Easter, and had promised to look out for a suitable re-engagement for her. Winny was not anxious to hear of her success. She hoped that if she were left some time at Cotham unemployed, her mother might let her slide into that system of daily teaching pursued by Delphine Mercier, which would give her the coveted liberty of evenings at home.

She did not speak of what she wished, because she thought it would come about more easily without formal introduction; and, in fact, Easter did arrive without any new situation having been proposed to her. She left her first with true regret.

Easter fell early that year, at the beginning of April, and Winny observed to her mother that if a temporary engagement offered in the town, she might as well accept it. Her mother did not gainsay her, and Winny let her friends know that she desired one. Mrs Brunton demurred, but added that if she were in earnest, it would not be far to seek; and the very next day a Mrs Rigby called to inquire for her. Mrs Rigby wanted all the accomplishments in perfection for five daughters; she required the services of a governess from eight in the morning to seven in the evening, and as her residence was over two miles from the town, she expected the person she employed to lodge in the house of a retired servant, living in the suburb going out that way. She offered a salary

of fifty pounds and dinner—thirty would be the expense of the lodging with breakfast and tea. She concluded her proposal with a remark that she knew it was one that many governesses would jump at. Winny Hesketh declined it, but immediately after she accepted a three hours' morning engagement at the opposite end of the town for thirty guineas. The widow Hesketh looked cruelly grieved when she heard it, and Susan assured her young mistress that she would have no peace at home while it lasted.

And Susan was right. There are cold days in April and May, bitter, windy, sleeting days, and such was the first Winny had to turn out in to go to her employment. If she had been going to execution her mother could hardly have seemed more dolorous, more mortified. Winny laughed at her, and went and came in matter-of-fact good-humour. That weather held for a week.

‘Never mind! It is showing me the worst

it can do, and summer is not far off,' she answered to her mother's plaintive remonstrances. Then: 'I shall be a very fortunate woman if I never have to encounter anything more disastrous than a wetting.'

But it was useless. The widow's prejudice was not to be overcome. Aunt Agnes also considered it much nicer for a young governess to live in a family than to be constantly in the streets. Winny was irritated. She thought all this very foolish. The restraint of other people's houses was irksome to her, and she wanted to stay with her mother. With her teaching and scribbling combined, she was sure she could help her, and be no burden at all. But Mrs Hesketh consistently declined to put her trust in that scribbling.

'What does your friend Miss Denham say?' was her final query.

Winny did not deny that Miss Denham was of the same opinion as Aunt Agnes—for herself Georgie claimed and took as much

liberty as her brothers, but for her sisters she was exceedingly strait-laced.

‘Everybody is of that opinion,’ said her mother conclusively. ‘Everybody — Miss Baxter, Mrs Knox, Mrs Brunton. In short, Winny, it will not do, and I will not have it. Even Mr Nicholls tells me when it is a bad day to be out, and watches your goings and comings.’

‘I wish Mr Nicholls would mind his own business,’ Winny replied curtly. She knew that the battle was lost, and gave in.

Mr Nicholls was not high in Miss Hesketh’s favour. The widow in her dearth of masculine counsellors had confided to him the literary aspirations of her daughter. There could be no doubt that she disliked and reprobated Winny’s scribbling as vain, and silly, and tending towards that undesirable publicity which is of all things by women to be avoided. Mr Nicholls agreed with her, and undertook to administer an authoritative admonition to the foolish girl. They had never met, when one fine day her mother said to Winny that

Mr Nicholls would be glad to see her sometimes. Winny would assuredly not have gone had she guessed what awaited her, but the invalid had many lonely hours, and she could not refuse to cheer them, now and then, if he asked for her society. So she went upstairs, knocked at his door, and, at his bidding, walked in.

Apparently they were a surprise to one another, for they both blushed. Winny Hesketh was struck with an instant, great compassion. The happy young look askance at death, as a foe not to be propitiated, invincible, terrible; and his shadow was in this room. Mr Nicholls stretched out a lean white hand to his visitor, and signed where she was to sit, then leant back in his own chair, and was silent for some minutes, breathing with pain and difficulty. Winny turned her pitiful face to the window. The approach of dissolution does not much affect a strong character. Mr Nicholls was a gentleman of a naturally arbitrary temper, and belonged to that type of churchmen who would have the priesthood

regarded as a sacred caste, invested with a spiritual power to which the laity must bow. Sickness had not humbled him. He had been a most conscientious and laborious worker for small reward, and his work had broken him down, but not his spirit. That was eager as ever to direct and control, to command and forbid, to bind and loose.

Winny Hesketh had never been brought into professional contact with a clergyman except when Mr Musty baptized and the bishop confirmed her. Theoretically she revered the whole body of the clergy, as her pastors and masters, according to the catechism ; but it was a severe shock and surprise when this young man (Mr Nicholls was under thirty) began to tax her with filial disrespect, and disregard for her mother's feelings, and to lay it to her conscience whether she had anything new to teach the world that she presumed to take pen in hand to write for the public press. She found not a word to say.

Teach the world ! She had never thought but of indulging her fancy and gratifying her

artistic taste when she made a sketch or wove a story—deliberately she had not so much as planned to amuse the world. It did not occur to her to bring forward the famous editor's testimonial to her merits, and the argument of pecuniary reward she would not have held as sound herself—for wrong things bring money as often as right things—and that she earned money by taking pen in hand could not convert the presumptuous act into a good deed if it were inherently bad and impertinent. So she held her peace—with an expressive face.

Mr Nicholls was intently gazing into the embers, and took her silence for consent to what he said. He proceeded to mention his hope that she would reflect upon it, and abandon the pursuit of a notoriety which was vanity, and conform her mind and conduct to the unobtrusive work of teaching, for which she had been educated. As she still did not speak, he looked round, and as her Uncle Hayland had done on a former occasion of spiritual remonstrance, he judged it wise to drop the subject. There was a little volume of translated German

hymns on the table which furnished another theme, and the visit was not prolonged. It was repeated on Mr Nicholls' invitation, but Winny did not find him congenial, either first or last.

She followed his advice, however, so far as to reflect upon it, and the consequences could not fail to be satisfactory both to him and to her mother. Shortly afterwards she made an agreement to go at Midsummer to a family in the dales—a very ancient family—the Peregrine-Harts of Hauxwell—a submission upon which she was generally congratulated.

Meanwhile, in the first week of June came on Miss Hutton's marriage.

CHAPTER X.

‘SAFETY LIES IN FEAR.’

WINNY HESKETH had many searchings of heart before she obeyed the summons to Foston for Mildred Hutton's wedding. If an easy way of escape had been shown her, it is possible that she might have made excuses to Mildred, and have stayed away. But there was no reason that she could allege either to her friend or her mother. Miss Dalby made her bridesmaid's dress with much taste, and expressed a hope that some day before long she might have the pleasure of making her another dress for a similar occasion, when she would play one of the two chief parts in the marriage.

‘I don't believe you ever will,’ Winny said quietly.

The widow Hesketh was sitting by. ‘You

are very well off as you are, Winny,' said she. 'Be thankful. You have nothing to regret.'

Winny was silent. Her affections were not discursive. She had no hankering to be married for curiosity, or pride, or idleness; but through Mr Durant's kindness she had come to a knowledge of the truth that there is a lot more desirable than to be sufficient to one's self. She had thought of him too much. And now, when she expected to see him again, she was afraid. However, the ordeal had to be encountered, and she had to trust that, as he was a gentleman, she would come through it without deeper hurt. Winny confided in Durant for herself, and not the less that, as Mildred Hutton phrased it, he was fond of her. He was much older and wiser than she was, and being fond of her, would not make his amusement out of her weakness. There was a goodness of nature in his kindness; perhaps her love never could have fixed where an unconscious faith did not go before. To casual observers she

seemed cold ; but one or two who knew her well discerned a latent intensity in her character that might be the ruin of her peace. Durant felt it. The same quality in himself had read him that secret—which might remain, perhaps, a secret always, if he did not reveal it to her himself. Would he use his power or would he forbear? Alone he, unfortunate, had the magic touch that could waken the music of the silent love-notes in her heart, which might be silent ever, and have no thrill of joy, no echo of pain in all her life, if he held his hand. There was temptation ; for he had taken her pretty image into his heart to worship—could dwell upon it with warm and tender desires, and be not ashamed. She was, indeed, the first love of his whole soul.

And here, perhaps, it is time to say how this Mr Durant came to be married, and living in the esteem of his neighbours without a wife.

That very propensity to be kind to the weak which had misled Winny Hesketh had been his own original undoing. It befell when

he was three-and-twenty, and roaming in Wales. The accidents of travel brought him indebted to a widow and her daughter, poor, and hardly knowing how to live. He succoured them with the easy generosity of his disposition. The girl repaid him with her love. She was a beautiful, impetuous young animal, perfectly ignorant and innocent. When Durant talked of leaving her she was for drowning herself in the mill-stream. This desperate act fired his imagination, enlisted his pity, touched, perhaps, his sense of honour. He took no thought for the morrow, but married her. Behold them coupled—a graduate of Cambridge, with considerable learning and a fastidious taste, and a Welsh damsel of warm passions and numerous aversions. For a few irksome months they lived together as man and wife. He had the most patience. She wearied very soon. When he tried to tame her, and teach her the tricks of society, she cried or yawned in his face. One day, while he was contemplating the indissolubility of the bond that united them, she left him,

and went back to the Welsh hills and her mother. He followed her. She would not be reclaimed to her cage—she threatened the mill-stream again. Here was a perplexity, indeed: Durant consulted the parson of the parish, who advised him to leave her where she was, and promised to keep an eye upon her. For two years the girl worked in her mother's house, and grew a woman. Durant spent the time partly at Rushmead, but chiefly abroad. He was abroad when he got the news that his wild bird had paired again; this time with a mate of her own condition, a champion quarry-man, who had carried her away somewhere beyond Shrewsbury. Durant blamed himself most. He could not punish her—he just let her go. With the great stone-hewer she lived laborious days, and became the mother of children. She was his wife by the law of natural selection—their morality would not square with the law of the land, but that did not trouble their toil or their repose. His friends urged Durant to get a release, but it was a less simple matter then

than now; besides it was given him in very deed. He avoided useless and needless publicity, and lived to all appearance, a contented bachelor. His intimates knew the story, but it had all happened a good while ago, and was not often talked about. Probably few of the rising generation or the new-comers into the district had heard it; and old friends were in the habit of checking inquiry and evading explanation with the careless statement that Mr Durant was too much of a rover to marry. Winny Hesketh had heard Mrs Brett say so to one of the engineers in the garden at Rushmead at the harvest-festival.

In the humiliation of being repudiated by one wife Mr Durant had not anticipated that he would ever wish to take another. And he never did wish it until he looked down on Miss Hesketh from the organ-loft of St Stephen's Church last Christmas Day. Then he discovered that passionate love had stolen a march on his cool reason, and for the first time the longing to appropriate and possess

what was out of his reach became urgent, ardent, otherwise unappeasable.

To go through the parody of a formal divorce after he had been practically divorced for a dozen years was an expedient that he hated. The stone-hewer and his wife were settled now in the north country. He was a Tynedale man of primitive feelings and prodigious strength. Durant had seen him and his children, fair, ruddy young sons of Anak; and he had seen and talked with their mother since Christmas—never having seen her before since their separation. She had matured into a grand rustic matron, fiercely tender of her progeny, and loving her master with a wholesome fear. She let Durant know that the episode in her life that belonged to him was her one sin against her husband.

‘He’d kill me if he heard you’d been about here,’ she said with an air of stern conviction.

Durant reproached himself for having gone near her—that episode had dwindled to a poor light-o’-love shadow on her memory against all the sweet years of contented

labour that she had lived since with husband and children. He could not harm her, could not bring any trouble upon her for his own old fault—a generous folly, but not the less a fault.

He left her, and had given himself to the investigation of the marriage-laws in foreign countries since, taking no one into his confidence. He had not much insight into Miss Hesketh's acquired principles. He felt that she was good ingrain—whether conventional right was inwrought with her native integrity beyond the wit and wiles of love to disentangle them, he had no means of judging. But he greatly feared it. Then came a brave determination to see her no more—for her sake too: why should he teach her to be most unhappy?—succeeded by a relapse into the enervating temptation of seductive hopes. A relapse so perilously deep that whether he would be ever recovered out of it depended much less upon his own good-will than on the degree of controlling force in the object beloved.

That man is an accountable being is a copy-book morality taught us in text-hand. Whether he is an accountable being when in love, poets, philosophers, and jurists are not agreed; but only the severest call him to strict account in those moving circumstances. Mr Durant was a man in love, and his friends and neighbours were blind to his vagaries.

About a week before the wedding he mentioned to Mrs Hutton the elder that he had an errand in London, and was sadly afraid that he might not be able to be present at the happy event—this was during his fit of self-denying fortitude. Mrs Hutton did not entreat him. She guessed at another reason besides that errand to London, and sincerely wished him perseverance. He had not made her any confession or required of her any counsel, but she knew enough to sympathise with him, and was prepared to be very comfortable to Miss Hesketh under the disappointment of his absence. But she expected to hear what she did hear: that when the Foston phaeton passed above Rushmead, bringing the young

lady to the House in the after-glow of a June evening, he was waiting at the stile for a first glimpse of her.

The young lady arrived with a countenance none the less sunny for his indiscretion. Winny's self-denying ordinances (like his) took all to flight the instant she saw him—his kind brown face, bright eyes and mirthful mouth, were utter foes to fear and dismal fancies. Nature had constituted them for happiness, and blithe moments, intervening amidst clouds and vapours, found them ever ready to avail themselves of the favours of fortune. Durant had the grace not to follow her to the House that night, and Winny had enough of joy with Mildred—so much to talk about with the wedding only three days off, and Winny the earliest of the guests upon the bustling scene.

‘You will have to be very busy,’ Mildred told her. ‘All the decorations and flowers are to be left to you and the Cranby girls. They are making the wedding-favours. Frank is to stay at Rushmead : he comes to-morrow.’

It was to be quite a grand wedding. Grand-

mamma Jarvis had been prevailed on to promise the lustre of her presence, and so had the great men of both families and their wives—Sir Rolf Jarvis, a knight of renown in Bristol, and Sir Joseph Hutton who, as Mayor of Hull, had presented an address to a royal personage visiting the town. Mrs Brett also was amongst the expected and most honoured guests, her gift to the bride being a hundred pounds' worth of silver plate, and an admonition to use it; for it would last her her life. This present appeared to much advantage amongst heaps of futilities; so did also the offering of Mr Melhuish: a satin-wood case of handsome table cutlery, with his own name upon it—the name of the maker as well. He came of a rich Hallamshire family, and was proud of his extraction.

‘Poor Melhuish has taken himself off to Sheffield out of the way, but he has placed his house at our disposal, and the grandees are going there,’ Mildred said. Though she used a pitiful word to describe Mr Melhuish’s state of mind, she smiled as she uttered it. Winny

Hesketh said she was very unfeeling. 'That is unfair,' cried her friend. 'You were his only adversary when he had a chance. If I had been more "feeling," perhaps I should have made the fatal mistake of taking pity on him, and be repenting it now. I am happy, I cannot tell you how happy, in my dear Frank!'

'Don't try to express it—I see.' Winny's voice had a slight bitter in its sweetness. Mildred came across the room, and kissed her with a murmurous, cooing, tender compassion. 'What does that mean?' inquired the recipient with feigned anger, yet trembling.

Mildred turned over gloves and laces, and gave her no answer. They were in their room for the night, secure from intrusion. A silence of five minutes ensued. Winny broke it by asking what was that faint perfume that Mildred's white things exhaled.

'Cassia. How it lasts! Durant brought it from Syria ever so long ago.'

Another silence ensued. Mildred's pretty chattels had been all passed in review. There

was a sigh somewhere. Mildred spoke. 'I am not sleepy, Winny—are you? I've been thinking it will never be quite the same with us two when I am married. A married woman belongs to her husband.'

'I have always understood so.'

It appeared that Winny desired to keep on the cool side of sentiment, amongst bracing airs.

'You are in one of your odd, sarcastic tempers, Winny; there is no knowing where to have you,' remonstrated her blessed friend. 'And I had a true, pathetic history to narrate—but you will not have patience to hear it. You don't care.'

'I was always a good listener, Milly; unfold your tale.'

At first Mildred said she would not—then she would—she must—she had promised. Finally she opened her story with the information that Durant had fallen quite out of spirits lately, had fallen into the slough of despond.

'The base pretender! I assure you, Mildred, he was at the stile this evening as gay as pos-

sible, and, unless my senses deceived me, he was smoking a capital cigar. You have been cruelly imposed upon.'

'Did he mention whether he would be able to defer his business in London until after the wedding?'

This was a very cunning, suggestive question of Mildred's, and brought Winny to her bearings.

'No, he did not mention anything.' She waited with sedateness for the development of the true, pathetic history.

Mildred took her time. But when it was told, it was the same tale of Mr Durant's marriage that has been told already. Every word of it was new to the absorbed listener. Mildred tagged a moral to the conclusion: 'And now you see, Winny, what mischief comes of being too feeling. If Durant had been a trifle harder-hearted he would be a free man this day. And now he will never be free.' And she gave Winny another of her compassionate, caressing kisses.

Winny seemed scarcely conscious of it:

‘He did not love her. She could not have left him if he had loved her—do you think she could, Milly?’ was her impressive inquiry. The restraining might of love Winny believed in vehemently.

‘I have given you the facts of the case, you must make out the metaphysics for yourself, Winny. ‘He did not love her, and her love was more passionate than permanent. When it tired they must have bored each other to extinction.’

Winny reflected a little: ‘It is not against him,’ she said. ‘I rather like him for being so foolish.’

‘My mother is of the same opinion. It is almost a pity he cannot repeat the folly—on behalf of some one he does love.’ Mildred dropt her voice at the last words. Winny could either hear them or not. She heard them, but made no sign.

The next morning Winny Hesketh and Bella from Cranby were in the arbour in the walled-garden whither they had been exiled

to construct their floral decorations, that the house might be kept clear of litter. Grandmother Hutton had sat with them a short while after breakfast, but had now gone off to the more important duty of superintending the kitchen.

Suddenly, his approach unheard, Mr Durant appeared in the entrance of the bower, lifted his hat, and asked if he might come in.

Bella said: 'Oh yes, come in. If you cannot help us, perhaps you may amuse us. And we want to know—are the myrtles in blossom in your greenhouse yet? Your myrtles are famous—they pay toll to all the weddings round.'

'I have been cherishing them for the purpose. They are full of buds, some half open. Who makes the bouquets?' the gentleman asked.

'I do,' Winny Hesketh said, looking up brightly for an instant, and then at the wreath of box again, that her fingers were entwining.

'Shall I send you my contribution the evening before or early in the morning?' Durant inquired.

‘Early in the morning, please—the wire, Bella.’

‘The wire! the wire! Oh, it is all done. Mr Durant, would you go to the house, and ask if they have any more wire? If you come here, you must condescend to be made useful.’

Mr Durant obeyed, but returned empty-handed. There was wire, but nobody was at leisure to seek it for him. Bella must go herself.

‘Let me go,’ Winny proposed with a certain eagerness.

‘No, stay where you are. You don’t know my sister’s store-room—I shall be back in five minutes.’

During those five minutes Mr Durant and Winny Hesketh were alone. Fully two of them elapsed in silence. Winny felt Durant’s questioning gaze upon her, and her colour deepened. She was compelled to raise her eyes, at last, and glancing at him with a smile that no effort could prevent being rueful, she said interrogatively: ‘Well?’

‘Am I to be a stranger, Miss Hesketh? You

see me in a new character—Benedict, the married man.'

'Not unless you wish it.' Winny laughed, and held out her hand—he signified that she had omitted the ceremony before.

'You are amused. May I know why?'

'You should, if I could tell you. But the why is complex. I am very sorry for you.'

Durant asked nothing more than that she should be sorry for him. That she should avow it went beyond his expectations. 'But it was only Winny's way. She meant to be frank with him upon the story that had been told her by his wish, and to give no opening to false, misguiding sentiment.

Bella returned with the wire, singing as she came.

'We shall want you by-and-by to help us in the cheese-room,' she said to the intruder. 'It is being all cleared out for the dance. The floor is like a springboard, but we must contrive to hide the white walls. Grandma is beginning to grieve already at our robbery of the ever-greens—what will she do before the day is

over ! You might give us some clippings from your overgrown shrubs at Rushmead, Mr Durant.'

'A cart-load, if you like.'

'Would it be too much to beg you to go, and order it to be brought over immediately?'

'Yes, it would, indeed, unless you both propose to bear me company ! Then Miss Hesketh can instruct me how to cut the myrtle.'

Bella shook her head : 'I am afraid, sir, you must go by yourself, and that the cutting of the myrtle must be trusted to your discretion. We have no idle time to spare.'

Mr Durant evaded the performance of the commission by sending over a boy with a written message. He was on the spot, therefore, when the answer to it came in a profuse supply of prunings. All the afternoon he was retained to assist the girls with his taste, advice, and long arms, and when permitted, at length, to consider his labours over, he was heard to remark that weddings were a toil

of a pleasure, and ought not to happen every day.

‘No! Once in a life-time is enough!’ cried Bella, who had never ceased her banter.

Winnie felt herself blushing, and Durant asked her, sportively, whether she was thinking that rule might have exceptions. Winnie Hesketh never considered it rude to give silent answers—she just laughed at him in his own key. His peculiar position was regrettable, no doubt; but his long desolateness had probably not been quite arid of consolations.

Grandmother Hutton looked in at the doorway to see how the work of decoration progressed. The cheese-room did not know itself for garlandry. The girls had ended their task, and sat on the floor, and Durant sat on the steps near.

‘Mr Durant has been most amiable in helping us all the day,’ Bella announced, and jumped to her feet.

‘So it appears. There was John Carpenter to be had for the asking,’ responded the old lady drily, and retired from the scene.

Her appearance had been disconcerting—that and her manner. The party broke up, and Mr Durant went home.

The night before the wedding there was a dinner at the House to which Mrs Brett and Mr Durant were invited, but from which all the girls were excluded, because there was no room for them at the table. They were merry in the drawing-room afterwards; as merry, that is, as the presence of the grandees allowed. Sir Rolf and Lady Jarvis proved to be stout and genial people, and it came out in the course of conversation that they were intimate with Miss Hesketh's relations, the Clarksons of Bristol, and that further, they had met at the Clarkson's house the Rutherfords from Hull, also her relations. Sir Joseph and Lady Hutton chimed in with the loud, surprised statement that the Rutherfords were amongst their dearest friends. And here it was whispered that but for the fact of the two young men running each other so close a cousin of Winny's, John Rutherford, would have been at Foston

to officiate as best man to Frank Jarvis to-morrow. Gran'ma Jarvis, in pursuit of social information, elicited more interesting particulars touching the wealth and local celebrity of Miss Hesketh's kinsfolk; but Winny spoilt all by abruptly saying that she knew none of them, had never seen them, had no idea what they were like, except that they were very rich.

'To be very rich is a character in itself, Miss Hesketh,' said Sir Joseph Hutton grandly. 'Mr Rutherford is the architect of his own fortunes, but he is one of nature's noblemen, and a benefactor of the human race.'

Winny professed that she was glad to hear it, but she appeared mighty indifferent. Her mother spoke of her sisters with wistful regret; for of late years even the rare intercourse of letters had ceased. In the estimation of some of the guests Mildred Hutton's governess-friend got a rise by this accident of having opulent connections. Mrs Brett and Mrs Hutton the younger signified as much; and Mr Durant, conspiring with himself how he should cheat his evil fortune and win her,

reflected that the more ties she had to the conventional world the more barriers it was likely that he would have to encounter in persuading her of a higher law. He had not yet quite persuaded himself of it—he wished to do so, but habit is strong, and established custom yet stronger. He had lived through the era of the passions, those most impetuous of bad advocates, and right reason would utter her voice, in defiance of his longing. Then Winny's good little face promised no taste for stolen fruit—he would not have loved her so if it had. He was in a perplexity of covetous tenderness, and chose to refer an attack of despondent irritation that he felt to the discovery that his bonny love had legions of kinsfolk and friends to be kind to her independent of him.

Lady Hutton and Lady Jarvis both promised Miss Hesketh, as if they were doing her a favour, that they would tell the Clarksons and Rutherfords how pleased they had been to meet her, and would be to meet her again. And Mildred suggested that she might be invited to Hull and to Bristol, and she must be sure to

go; for it would do her good, to see a little more of the world, and perhaps, she would fall in with somebody nice—this was in private, of course, and accompanied by one of Mildred's cooing kisses.

For once this caressing provoked Winny—that and the suggestion accompanying it. 'Don't tease, Milly! I am tired, and a fig for my rich relations!' was her response. 'Week after next I go to my new situation up in Rusdale, where I shall have a holiday only once a year.'

'And part of your next year's holiday is pledged to me, if all be well. O Winny! what a year may bring forth! Last year at this time there was little prospect of Frank, and how distracted I was! Do you remember? I don't believe there was a woman on earth more miserable than I was sometimes. And I would not change my fortune to-morrow to be queen of the world!'

Winny stood dumb, gazing out into the moonlit night with that queer pathetic expression that Sissy Broome described as like a dog

that had lost its master. Mildred came and stood by her. Just at that moment the garden door was opened and shut, and the next minute two figures appeared on the white road. They both looked back towards the House, then walked fast away.

‘Why there’s Durant and Frank—only just setting off home! It must be quite late!’ exclaimed Mildred. ‘I thought they had gone an hour ago.’ Then, after a pause, with an arm round Winny’s neck, and a kind, inquisitive regard, she said: ‘Poor Durant, he was quite out of tune to-night. Don’t you pity him, Winny? You would if you guessed how fond he is of you.’

Winny released herself from Mildred’s embrace, and said she did not wish to know—had they not better speculate on the somebody nice who might be met with at Bristol or Hull? Mildred retorted that she was a cross little thing, and would tell her nothing. She did not believe that she was one bit sorry for poor Durant. Winny rejoined that Milly was a sentimental goose—what could she

have to tell? She had not a secret in the world.

‘No, that you have not, Winny!’ Mildred exclaimed softly—but quite in another sense from that in which her friend spoke.

The next minute they kissed, and resumed in silence their business of putting their last things in readiness for the morrow.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WEDDING-DAY AT FOSTON.

MILDRED HUTTON had for her wedding-day a day of almost cloudless sunshine from dawn to dusk.

Winnie Hesketh left her sleeping. Some one came with a tap and a whisper to their door as early as seven o'clock. 'The basket of myrtle and a note from Mr Durant.' Winnie was ready to take them in, and the note was for her—only a few lines, but Mr Durant's notes were always worth keeping for some touch of fun. When Mildred awoke with a subdued sense of all-pervading happiness, she opened her eyes on her friend, perched in the window-seat, serene and pleasant as the summer morning, her two slippers on a footstool, and her lap overflowing with a glossy heap of bridal-green.

The three bridesmaids' bouquets were made.

‘This is yours, Milly dear,’ said Winny, holding up a beauty in process of construction. ‘See the lovely buds, the lovely open blossoms—myrtle is something rare to me.’ Her voice sounded sweet as a song.

‘There are hedges of myrtle in Devonshire and Cornwall where we are going,’ said Mildred, rising on her elbow to contemplate the aspect of this latest caprice. Then she added: ‘You are going to be a darling to-day, Winny, I hear you are.’ Winny peeped round with a propitious smile, and proffered no retort or denial.

Presently the house-mother arrived, and Winny gathered up her treasures to retire to the window on the landing, a spacious landing where everybody passed up and down with cheerful congratulations on the splendour of the morning. ‘And it will last. I hope this weather may hold out until we get the hay,’ Mr Hutton said, stopping to take a circular observation of the horizon, and remembering his farming interests even on this solemn and joyful day.

Towards eleven o'clock the two elder little boys as bridesmen, in blue tunics and white favours, made a pretty, turbulent rush into the drawing-room, and assisted in the entertainment of the guests. To match them there was the smallest girl from Cranby, and a tiny sister of the bridegroom. Winny Hesketh was chief bridesmaid, and the groomsman was a Mr Bruce Jarvis from town—an illustrious young sprig who elevated his chin, wore a moustache, and lisped, whether by nature or art was not ascertainable. In the absence of his friend John Rutherford the bridegroom had bespoken this London cousin for best man—and there he was, the one infelicitous object, scrutinising through eyelids half-closed the manners and customs of these amazing Bœotians, his North-shire kin and new connections.

Mr Durant, as he had been on many former occasions, was again on this Winny Hesketh's main stay and resource. Under the most favourable circumstances her appointed partner for the day must have been a nonentity, and Winny was intolerant of nonentities who gave

themselves supercilious airs. Her spirited demeanour was charming to Mr Durant whom she preferred, and he contrived that the dandy from town should enjoy very little of her attention and favour.

When the bride appeared she was gracious, fair, calm, self-possessed, and with not the symptom of a tear. She wore white silk, a chip bonnet and lace veil (brides did wear bonnets in those days unless they were proud princesses or daughters of high degree), and bonnets without veils shaded the rosy cheeks of her maids. Durant and the best man had been at the House for final instructions, but had gone back to Rushmead in Mrs Brett's carriage to attend the bridegroom to church. The church was so near to the House that the bride's procession walked, a dozen couples, a very goodly company, and the matrons in most sumptuous apparel. The gentlemen were even more imposing, being all of tall stature, and fine, prosperous presence.

There was the rector of Lownde, an old family friend, and the rector of Cranby to per-

form the marriage-service, and in the church-porch waited the bridegroom and his supporters, to receive the bride as she drew near, leaning on her brother's arm. All went well. The bridegroom held up his head, a very elegant and handsome young man, and took his vows as if he meant to keep them—because he was nervous, his cousin explained to Miss Hesketh; men always spoke up louder and sharper when in nervous circumstances. Mildred's soft voice was clear too, and everybody assured everybody else, when the ceremony was over, that it was impossible anything could have gone off more perfectly than it had done. The return to the House was accomplished with cheering of cottagers and children who were to be feasted in the big barn, and Durant, overtaking Winny Hesketh at the garden-door, observed that her friend's romance had been brought, at last, to a happy consummation, and he thought Frank Jarvis and Mildred were equally fortunate.

Winny blushed and faltered that she was glad—no more; and Durant fancied that she

winked away a tear or two as she avoided him, and escaped upstairs. The fact was, Winny had never heard the marriage-service before, and it had astonished her—had put to flight all her foolish, airy, fantastic notions of courtship and love. She found Mildred weeping and sobbing on her mother's shoulder, and Frank, somewhat solemnised himself, exercising the office of a comforter. She took herself out of the way. Evidently the happy consummation of their romance had its graver aspects for them both.

At one o'clock followed the breakfast, with speeches, toasts, and healths in the country style; and at three the happy pair drove off under a shower of old shoes, and pursued by hearty cheers and good wishes. Everybody seemed relieved when the tension was over. As for Mrs Brett, she did not hesitate to express aloud her satisfaction at being well rid of them.

'They're gone, that's a blessing! I always say I never will go to another wedding, and as sure as I'm asked, I go,' said she

groaning wearifully. 'Such a silly, vapouring preface as it is to an awful, dull story!'

'How can you say that, Mrs Brett? A wedding is great fun!' cried Bella from Cranby.

'Great fun, indeed! That's all you know about it,' rejoined the old lady with scornful compassion. And then she appealed to Miss Hesketh for a safe and quiet place of retirement where she might rest and take a nap; for though she regretted coming to the wedding, she meant to stay for the dance. Winny convoyed her to the room that Mildred had abandoned, and was detained for conversation until drowsiness overwhelmed Mrs Brett. 'Now go,' she said. 'I feel that I shall sleep.'

The other grandees adjourned to the rectory for an interval of repose, and Mr Durant carried off a younger detachment to Rushmead, all to return at eight o'clock, with reinforcements for the dance in the cheese-room. The girls left at the House, with the feast in the barn to help at, and the supper-table to organise, got but a brief rest,

but that was better than none. Winny Hesketh evidenced her fatigue by absent thoughts and words at cross-purposes. Bella from Cranby was wondering in despair how everybody was to find a place at supper.

‘They’ll all have to sit on two chairs,’ said Winny resignedly.

‘Indeed, but they’ll be in luck that get one!’ cried Bella. ‘You and me may be thankful for a corner of somebody else’s. I wish Melhuish were here. Durant will take care of you. There’s a beautiful supper. I want my supper at a ball—don’t you?’

Bella had her supper in due time, and enjoyed it though she occupied the music-stool all to herself. Winny preferred the dancing, especially with the elder gentlemen who made a smart figure, and exhibited a quite superior agility. Mr Bruce Jarvis lounged as if it were too much trouble to dance, and soon found himself at a discount amongst the country girls. It was admirable to see the lightness of the fat men, Sir Rolf and Sir Joseph, and their wives were pleased to

have them appreciated by the rising generation. The wives danced a little but they danced often, and between the old and the young the girls had no want of partners. Sir Rolf awarded the palm of beauty to Winny Hesketh, who would have been seriously astonished, and possibly not flattered, had she heard in what terms. Mrs Brett and he had become sociable, and as Winny passed them, borne down a long country-dance by Mr Jarvis, the old lady pointed her out, saying, *there* was the girl for *her* money.

‘A very handsome little lady, indeed—well-knit figure, rosy, healthy; not one of your whey-faced chits that look as if they had never been more than half fed,’ said Sir Rolf.

Durant was sitting by, watching her with mingled kindness, amusement, and dejection. She was too much taken up by the old beaux to have much thought for him, and seemed as gay and happy as a girl need wish to be. Presently she came near them, and Durant

stepping up, asked over her shoulder if she would keep Sir Roger de Coverley for him.

‘That will be the last dance,’ said she, glancing round with neither yes nor no, but with a touching deprecation in her eyes. Winny was conscious of his presence every moment, but she had avoided him.

‘You will?’ he urged, though he understood her. Winny saw his face, pale and darkened with pain.

‘It is the last dance. I have not promised it.’ The thought passed through her mind that she might never see him again, perhaps. He took her words for consent, and returned to his seat.

Mrs Brett had observed his excited air with amazement and displeasure, and used the privilege of long friendship to offer him advice. ‘Don’t be a dog-in-the-manger, Durant. That is not right. Let the girl alone. *You* can’t marry her—give her a chance of somebody else.’ Durant made no answer. ‘Whoever gets her, she’ll want a deal of humouring,’ added the old lady smiling with amused recollection.

Durant felt that he would not object to humour her ; that he would, indeed, like no sport better than the sport of humouring her.

Winny Hesketh did not take thought for any tender hopes that Mr Durant might be indulging. She found him kind and good as ever, and was half sadly, half shyly conscious that she loved him more than was wise, and that he knew it. But after this day they would, perhaps, never meet any more—the pleasure, the pain, and the peril would all be over. She had a will not to repine at her fortune, and she was doing her best to be happy even now.

Grandmother Hutton noticed her with approval. ‘You have been a real help, my dear, towards making all go off so cheerfully,’ said she, stroking Winny’s oval cheek with her fan. ‘Some day I hope your turn will come, and be as fortunate as Mildred’s. I suppose you will not have much gaiety and dancing when you go to your new situation ?’

‘I expect none,’ said Winny. ‘My pupils are four again—one boy and three girls, and I

am warned that I shall have no easy life with them. But I am not afraid.'

The band ceased, then struck up the inspiring tune of Sir Roger de Coverley. Durant advanced to claim his partner. Winny met him with a beaming cordiality. Durant admired her, loved her, felt how dear and dearer she every moment grew to him, longed to call her sweet, pretty names as Mildred did, but he could not; he had to keep his tender, passionate sentiments all to himself. Winny looked bright and modest, and expected nothing less than a declaration of his wild pretensions.

The last dance was kept up famously, but the longest and best must have an end, and the music changed abruptly to 'God save the Queen.' There was an instant arrest and break-up, and Winny said to her partner as they passed with the crowd from the cheese-room down a long passage to the house—

'I must bid you good-night now—and it is good-bye too, Mr Durant.'

'How, good-bye? I heard that you were to

stay after the wedding,' said he hurriedly, and seeking to detain her hand.

'No. I leave to-morrow. So good-bye—and thank you for being so good to me.' She changed colour, and though her nervous little fingers were resolutely withdrawn, she looked up with eyes fuller of loving expression than she knew.

The pale disturbance of Durant's countenance that had moved her before distressed her again. He muttered something about seeing her at home shortly—if he went abroad as he had an idea he might do soon—might be compelled to do, on a contingency that he did not state. Winny heard him without answering a word. They were in the midst of a throng. Winny felt very grieved, very sad and sorry, but her voice was almost cold as she reiterated her good-bye, and left him. He did not speak. The suddenness of his disappointment made him scarcely master of himself, and it was quite as well that the beloved object disappeared from his view. Mrs Brett, to whom he turned as a refuge, asked if he was going to faint—adding

that she had never imagined a man at his age could be such a fool—the best counsel she could give him was that he should walk home in the composing night air, and the next day take a complete change of scene and society.

‘And if you are the good fellow I have always believed you to be, you will not trouble that nice little thing’s peace of conscience by any manifestation of your preposterous weakness—she does not suspect it, and would not understand it,’ concluded the old lady with the keenest emphasis.

And that was all the commiseration and sympathy Mr Durant got, or was likely to get, in his own neighbourhood for falling in love when he knew it was of no use, and ought to have minded what he was about with a girl in the house of a friend. He endeavoured to see Winny in the morning, but that was averted by the agency of Mrs Brett and Mrs Hutton. Winny looked out for him at the stile, but he was not there. She had been started on her journey half an hour earlier

than was necessary on the plea of convenience to Mrs Brett, and when Durant came up the fields to get a word with her in passing, the phaeton had gone by. Winny was disappointed too.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO FAREWELLS.

MISS DENHAM and Winny Hesketh met accidentally by the river the morning after Winny's return home from Foston. They walked gently forward in the bright sunshine, a big Newfoundland dog, Georgie's property, careering on in front. On the one hand was the towing-path and the slow river shrunk in its bed; on the other was the brick wall, and the lime-trees nodding over, that shut in the Manor School gardens.

Georgie was satisfied with the undetailed fact that Mildred's wedding was happily over, and then passed direct to her own personal concerns. She was writing, and she wanted Winny to read what she had written, and to give an opinion. Winny was quite ready to undertake the task of reading, but as for her opinion :

‘You know quite well that I shall think whatever you do is good,’ she said. ‘And if I did not, I should never like to mortify you by saying so. You are rather sensitive, Georgie.’

‘You promise to read my manuscripts, Winny—that is all I ask,’ persisted Miss Denham.

‘Yes, I’ll read them in moderation. Don’t run away, though, with the notion that writing is all fun’—and Winny communicated her mother’s adverse, discouraging sentiments, and the admonition that Mr Nicholls had been inspired to give her—an admonition that she could not yet get over, and which had quite spoilt her little pride in her forthcoming book.

‘You have a very pretty talent, Winny, so never mind, and papa thinks you have wonderful luck to get a start so easily. You will write domestic fiction and essaykins on ephemeral subjects, and if they pay, what more do you care for? I shall try a higher flight; for I do honestly believe that I have something beyond mere talent.’

‘We always said at school that you had a streak of genius.’

The friends continued some minutes in silence. Georgie was modestly satisfied with Winny’s revival of former praise. Now, no more than then, could she work without sympathy. Winny liked it too on the rare occasions when she got it, but it was not imperatively necessary to her. Her fount of fancies was perennial, and the mere flowing of the quiet waters pleased her, whether they fertilised her life or not. She did not fill herself with any large imaginings of what she was going to do or to be. She remembered Mr Caleb’s prediction in the days when she went to Mr Cave’s drawing-class, and also a few kind words of the ex-actress, Mrs Fleetwood; but otherwise she had not come in the way of over much flattery. She looked up to her betters with the most grateful admiration, and not a grain of discomfortable envy. Even emulation seemed to be left out of her character, or else it had been so dwarfed for want of use that it had not height or strength or

will to rise. She was prepared at any hour to see Georgie achieving more and greater successes than her own, and only anticipated in them the pleasure that arises from similar interests and occupations amongst friends.

As they were about parting, Georgie, with a trifle of malice, said: 'And the wedding at Foston was a scene of perfect satisfaction?—Mr Durant was there, of course?'

'Mr Durant was there, Georgie—and a nice doctor you'll make if you are always pulling off the bandages to see how a wound is healing!' With this retaliatory thrust, meant to be very severe, Winny turned back towards Castle Green, and Georgie, laughing, but colouring also, went the other way. She was disconcerted by the imputation of curiosity, not because it was cruel but because it was foolish.

When they had both gone about a score of yards they looked behind them, and nodded and waved a restoration of peace and goodwill.

A few days later, when Winny and her mother returned in the cool of the evening from Holworth Grange, whither they had been to drink tea and eat ripe fruit according to old custom, Susan handed her young mistress a card, with the announcement that the gentleman had called twice since they went out. It was Mr Durant's card; and he had left a message that he should hope to see Miss Hesketh in the morning.

Winny's face betrayed her to her mother, who asked in a tremulous, astonished voice: 'Winny, what does this mean?'

'It means nothing, mother. Mr Durant is married,' was her answer—a conclusive answer, as she fancied.

The widow looked still more troubled, and sat down, shaking all over. 'Don't see him, Winny. Your face tells me a tale. It would break my heart, indeed, it would!' Her voice rose almost to a cry.

'I will not break your heart, mother. What do you fear? Mr Durant will be going on his travels again, and wants just to say good-bye.

He is so kind and pleasant that I see no reason why we may not be friends.'

'He is the gentleman you spoke of before as being so kind to you at Foston. Winny dear, suspect his kindness. A girl cannot be a man's friend unless she expects to be his wife. And now you say that he has a wife.'

'Yes—but I did not know it when we first made acquaintance. I'll tell you the story another time. He is a good and generous person, and would not, I'm sure, do me any wrong.—Are you sorry, mother? What pains you took to arm me against the peril of men—yet unawares love of one has found a way to creep in—I suppose it's nature! But don't fret: there'll be no broken hearts this time.'

Winny sounded rather reckless, but she wished to pacify her mother; and she had, indeed, no apprehensions now, either present or future. In the morning she was silently disposed and paler than usual. Perhaps, she had wept, and had not slept much. The widow knew these signs, and was agitated

with anxiety and distress for her child, and Mr Nicholls was worse.

‘I fear he will not be long,’ she said.

‘Poor fellow!’ was Winny’s exclamation. Then: ‘Don’t take another invalid to lodge in the house, mother. It is too much for you.’

‘I cannot refuse what offers, dear Winny. Invalids must lodge somewhere, and my rooms are nice and quiet.’

Winny was already diverted to something else. She saw Mr Durant across the Green, and said hastily: ‘I’ll put on my bonnet, and walk with him by the river.’ To herself she added, that out-of-doors she would be less liable to behave foolishly.

Mr Durant had been to London since the wedding at Foston. He looked himself again, though he had undergone vexations in the interim. Whatever private hopes he had conceived of release from his old bonds by fiat of law, or of their evasion by means of the superior laxity of foreign marriage customs, had been summarily abolished by a visit to a

legal friend. Nothing but the death of his wife could ever set him really free. In the absence of other comfort, Durant had been relieved by the secondary thought that he had made no one but his legal friend his confidant. This was something. It enabled him to meet Miss Hesketh in his easy, simple way. The total extinction of present hope had sobered his mind, and restored his clear vision of what was due to her. It was impossible that he should repent having won some return to his passion, and he did not repent. That was his chief consolation, indeed.

Winny had guessed right. He was going on his travels again, and he had come to Cotham to tell her so. He assumed that he had this right, and Winny was in no state to deny it. The idea that he was leaving England quite subdued her pride. She blushed like a china rose, and tried very hard to still the quiver of her soft little mouth, but the effort was a complete failure.

‘I don’t like to think of Rushmead, shut up

and deserted,' said she, her thoughts reverting to that bright harvest-day.

'Nor I,' said he. 'But I cannot bear the stillness. I am tired of roving, but roving is better than an empty house that is no home. I always see you now in that room I call my mother's—you remember?'

If she remembered! she did not speak. He had meant to be quite cool and reasonable, but the emotion of her face gave him a tenderer licence. 'You know how I love you,' he said with a suppressed fervour—'know it as well as if I had sworn it to you a thousand times—no man will ever love you with a truer affection, a warmer passion. But the luck is against me. If I have said too much, forgive me!'

He had not said too much. His words were the sweetest balm to Winny's sore heart: 'Oh,' said she, 'I have nothing to forgive. We are very unfortunate. It is little to say that I love you too. I shall always recollect how good you were to me when I was amongst

strangers. I do not expect ever again to meet with so kind a friend.'

Durant smiled at her heedless confession—she did not perceive it, for her eyes were swimming in tears: 'I think,' said he, 'you are one who will meet with kind friends everywhere.' It was lucky they were by the riverside, in the unsentimental, unsoftened light of day, else he must have kissed her at that instant for pure kindness, and the slow, silent tears would have swelled into a flood.

By-and-by he informed her of where he was going—on a search expedition in the footsteps of a party of long ago explorers of the debatable regions that lie between the dominions of Russia and our empire in India. This was a far cry, indeed! Winny knew nothing of these regions unless upon the map; but Durant had once before penetrated some way into the districts that were to be invaded, and he was able to give her information, with a clue where to seek for more. She was not afraid to express a frank, warm interest in what concerned him, and he was pleased and moved by it. After

his long unsettled life he had not a friend unoccupied enough to care to follow his wanderings—unless it were this little friend. Popular as he was when at home, it was with him as with others—out of sight, out of mind—and he knew it. The world is too busy every day to have much thought to spare for those beyond its easy ken. Only they who love us, bear us in mind. He asked Winny if he might write to her by such rare opportunities as were likely to occur, and she accepted the offer with lively gratitude—then she checked herself lest it might put him to trouble.

‘No, indeed,’ said he rather plaintively. ‘Unless to some Fellow of the Geographical Society, or to my agent in London, I shall need to write no letters. It will be a pleasure to discourse to you of this, that, and t’other.’

‘And if you like I will discourse back to you of what we are doing at home. Mildred shall tell me all the news of the wolds.’

‘I should like it. The post does not run in those countries as it runs here, but write, write. Somewhere I shall pick up your letters. A

letter from England, what a godsend it is! To be quite out of hearing, to feel forgotten, neglected—ah, the pain of it! But you don't know—I hope you never will.'

'You will not be forgotten,' said Winny.

They walked a mile along the river, then turned on their steps again — the cruelest moments of their parting over.

'And meanwhile you will be prisoned in a schoolroom in Rusdale, deep in the wild moors and fells—doing what?'

'Doing routine duty with children, and perhaps, not speaking to a grown-up person once a week.'

Mr Durant's impulse was to be glad of that. He was almost tempted to exact a promise from her, but he looked in her young face, bethought him of his own years, and his good sense forbade it. Let her be happy if God would! It is proverbially weary work waiting for vacant shoes, and he would have hated to perturb her mind with vain hopes, set against the dark uncertainties of life. It was an immense consolation to Winny to be assured that Durant

loved her. Thoughts of him might cheat her solitude now of its cheerlessness. And he was more at rest, knowing her at rest. They did not make their farewell long. As they crossed the Green Durant asked if there was not some one ill in Mrs Hesketh's house, and Winny told him the pathetic annals of the broken-down poor curate.

'Oh, but it is a blessed thing to see the sun!' was Durant's emphatic response. 'Life is very sweet. God grant a long day to you and me, and leave to meet again in better times!'

'Amen,' said Winny with her bright, uplooking smile. And with that they shook hands, and separated, and Winny went indoors, saying to herself with rueful resignation that here, then, was the end of her love-story, cut short in its first chapters, and without any tragedy that she could mourn for.

Mr Nicholls continued to decline. He was wearing away fast. On the afternoon before Winny Hesketh was to leave home for her new

situation he asked to see her. She went with some unwillingness.

‘There is nothing to be afraid of,’ her mother told her.

The restlessness and longing for change of place that often precede death by consumption had overtaken the poor gentleman, and his bed had been removed into the parlour. He lay supported upon high pillows—a daunting and pitiful spectacle to that girl who had never before been brought face to face with the dissolution of mortality. Hanging from the rail at the foot of the bed was a small ivory crucifix that his eyes rested on. He held out a feeble hand, and Winny put hers into it. His fingers closed upon her fingers, so soft and warm, but neither spoke a word. She bit her lip hard to keep back the springing tears. He looked up at her, then at the crucifix, and bowing his head with a gentle significance, looked at her again. She gave him the same mute token, and went away.

Dr Archer, when he had paid his evening visit, told Mrs Hesketh that she must be pre-

pared for the final change at any hour. Winny heard him, and proposed to go for Nanny Anson to relieve her mother, and share the distress of nursing. Nanny Anson was the person always summoned to the widow Hesketh's house in any emergency.

‘There is daylight enough for me to go, and she will be with me coming back,’ Winny said.

Her mother raised no obstacle, but only answered: ‘I wish you would, Winny dear—I feel rather shaken, and Susan was up the greater part of last night.’

When Winny Hesketh was a little girl the two miles to the village of Ripley where Nanny Anson lived were much abridged by taking a short cut across pleasant green fields; but these fields were private gardens now, and scattered over with houses, and she took the longer way round by the road. For a considerable distance it ran through a suburb of small mansions of gentility, much given to array of flowers in their windows, but for over a mile it was a lonely highroad, between thick and lofty hedgerows,

and bordered on one side by a well-gravelled, wide path of which the townsfolk, dwelling towards that outlet from the town, made a favourite evening stroll. Winny, with all the way to Ripley to go, did not stroll but walked apace. She met some whom she knew, and more who knew her; for her brief essay at teaching, as Delphine Mercier did, had brought her daily in this direction, and so true to time had she been that one or two of the shopkeepers with whom she was friendly had said they could set their clocks by her. She liked their greeting as she passed their doors, and it seemed to shorten her walk this evening to meet the old bookseller and his brother, the politest men in Cotham, of whom she bought her books, and the very fat confectioner who from her infancy had sold her ounces of comfits and acid drops without weighing, and as she knew now, had retained her as a faithful customer at an annually accumulating loss.

The tower of Ripley church was in sight, and the leisure saunterers were left behind, when Winny overtook a person in black, walking

slowly towards the village. She passed her, but was recalled by name : ‘ Surely that is Miss Winifred—her quick, light step ? ’ and turning round she saw that it was Miss Hubbard who spoke—her ancient adversary. Not that she recollected in the surprise of the moment that they had ever been adversaries. She made a respectful acknowledgment to her superior, but said at the same time that she must not loiter, she had an errand to do, and to go home again.

‘ Decisive as ever, Miss Winifred,’ replied Miss Hubbard, and quickened her own movements to keep up with the young girl.

Winny told her where she was going, and what for, and then Miss Hubbard returned her confidence with the information that she was spending her midsummer holidays in cottage-lodgings at Ripley, having lost an only married sister with whom she had been used to make her home.

‘ If I had known you were at Ripley I would have come to see you,’ said Winny.

‘ Would you, indeed ? I should have been

glad, for I am quite alone. Mrs Brunton told me not long since that you were gone to Foston to be bridesmaid to dear Miss Mildred Hutton.'

Winny gave her an account of the wedding, and some other items of news respecting old schoolfellows. And this talk brought them to a lane that branched off to the church and new rectory, near which Miss Hubbard had her lodgings. Here they parted, and as Winny went on her way alone, she wondered in her own mind whether her warm love would waste and fade with years, as this antipathy had done, once so lively and pronounced.

Nanny Anson was in her garden, tending her flowers, and little expecting a summons to trudge to Cotham so late. 'My joy, what brings you over here at this time o' night?' cried she as Winny opened the gate. Nanny dressed always of an afternoon in light chintz gowns and big, frilly net caps with bows, and looked as smart as the bunch of gilly flowers she held in her hand.

Winny told her errand, and Nanny was

prompt in acquiescence. 'I'll come, my honey, only wait till I put up a few things, and speak to a woman-neighbour to give puss his milk—my nephys can't be trusted to do that—not they. Will you rest in the house a bit, or go and eat a few currants off the wall—the red ones are beautiful and ripe.' I was thinking I'd pick 'em to-morrow, and carry to your mother to make her jelly. And she'll want some to mix wi' rasps preserving—not that she uses much preserves since you and Master Dick's away. How he did love roly-poly, that boy !'

Winny went into the house, and sat down until Nanny was ready. Once upon a time, and not so very long a time ago, the cottage that Nanny Anson lived in was the parsonage-house. The kitchen was what had served the parson himself, a large, low-raftered place with a brick floor and open chimney, and no cooking apparatus but a bakestone. Nanny's bedroom next it might have been his wife's parlour, and her cow-house the retreat of his studious mo-

ments, if any such he had. There was a back-place, so called, and a step-ladder to the lofts under the thatch where the nephews slept—all nice and warm, Nanny averred, and a deal more for her money than the one-brick-thick slated houses that were run up for labouring folk now-a-days.

‘We must put our best foot foremost to get to Cotham ere it’s dark,’ Nanny said as she locked the door, and hid the key where the nephews were used to find it in her absence.

It was already deep, soft twilight, a lovely night, and the air perfumed with the sweet breath of hawthorn in the hedges. The bells of the parish church were chiming ten o’clock as they began to draw near to the town. There was no moon, and the lamplighter was running about with his ladder, lighting the street-lamps. Mrs Hesketh had been watching for their arrival, and stood with the door open when they came up. She looked pale and agitated, and said that she had begun to fear Nanny could not be spared from home.

‘He is gone,’ she said to Winny, ‘gone since you went out.’

Winny echoed the word with awe: ‘Gone!’

Susan entered from the street, followed by a decent, quiet man, a joiner, whom Winny had often stood to watch doing a job of work at the house when she was a little girl. He nodded to Mrs Hesketh, and went straight up stairs. Nanny went too. The widow and her daughter turned back into the parlour, speaking with bated breath.

Her mother looked at Winny: ‘You are tired—eat your supper, and go to bed. Have you any packing to finish for to-morrow?’

‘Not much—only what must be left till the morning. But I would like to sit up with you, mother.’

‘I shall not need to sit up—no one need sit up now. His sufferings are over. We may all go to bed, and sleep to-night.’

It seemed so strange, so very strange to Winny—death was but an incident. On the

morrow she was going fifty miles away, for an absence, if all went well, that would last a year. Her mother wished her gone just now, and forgot for how long she was to lose her. Winny did not forget, but her mother's anxiousness and pressing cares seemed often to shut her out from consideration. Some day, perhaps, there might be a change, when she would be permitted to live at home in her own way, and to close the door against strangers—but here her thoughts paused with pity on the stranger that her mother had taken in.

‘Poor mother, you are doing a better day’s work than ever I shall do!’ said she.

‘You don’t know, Winny. Your day’s work is only in its beginning yet,’ replied her mother.

They went upstairs together when the house was still for the night, and Winny, for the first time in her life reversing the old order of things, stayed in her mother’s room until she was laid down in bed.

‘It will soon be my turn to tuck you up, mother,’ said she.

But the widow was very serious. 'Not yet, Winny. I am as able and willing for my duty as ever I was.'

'Yes, indeed. I wish at your age I may be as willing. But I am afraid I shall not.'

'You must be prudent, and look forward to the rainy day, and provide against it.'

'Oh yes! But I shall not put all my treasure in Cotham Bank—that may break. I shall have more than a hundred pounds this year, and twenty serve me for dress; so, mammy dear, if you want any, be good and take it. And don't despise my fairy-money, for I expect some day that is what I shall have to live on. There—good-night. You won't have me to-morrow.'

Winny spoke with a cheerful voice, but when she went up to her eyrie, and gazed round at her preparations for the next day, she sighed and was quite sad and sorry. There were, indeed, circumstances attending this, her second departure to an unknown home, that might excuse her feeling a little down-hearted. That

very day she had a letter from Mr Durant at Southampton. Already he had sailed—at this very moment he was on the great wide, perilous sea.

CHAPTER XIII.

HARD SERVICE.

WHEN Winny Hesketh peremptorily declined the sinecure office of companion to that rich, free-spoken, country lady, Mrs Brett, she uttered a fervent aspiration to be let do something for her living. As governess to the younger members of the family at Hauxwell her aspiration was, at once, in the way of ample fulfilment.

It was on a beautiful late June day that she travelled up into Rusdale. Twelve miles at the end of her journey were performed in an antiquated, market-going machine, compounded of gig and tax-cart. The horse, however, was a cheerful goer, and he had need to be ; for all the way was up-hill and down dale, following the windings of a broad valley. A river ran in its depths, and its large declivities were

dotted with villages, farmsteads, and gentlemen's seats. A perpetual and enchanting variety of prospect was revealed, and Hauxwell came into view towards five of the afternoon, the time of day which shows a summer landscape at its loveliest. Winny Hesketh was inexpressibly glad that her reluctant new service had brought her into such a fine and populous part of the country, and felt her spirits rising again to her circumstances.

The house at Hauxwell was built on the slope of a hill facing south, and was backed with dark and far-stretching fir-woods. Externally it was an old stone house, rambling, irregular, and without dignity. Inside it was warm in winter and cool in summer, ugly, but comfortable.

Miss Hesketh was introduced to Mrs Peregrine-Hart in her morning-room, immediately on her arrival—it was a square room with sash-windows, and dwarf book-cases round the walls. Above the book-cases were numerous paintings of local scenery, harsh and crude in

colour, the work, probably, of local genius. The lady of the house was stout, plain, in manner affable, and possessed of genuine kindness; and contemplating her gentle serenity, the new governess, who had heard from more than one exponent a very alarming account of her future pupils, permitted herself to hope that they might not turn out so bad as they were represented.

But when she was conducted to the school-room where the young people expected her appearance this hope collapsed. They offered her no welcome, kept their seats, and looked her over with defiant curiosity; and their survey accomplished, the eldest girl muttered something at which the rest laughed. Their mother seemed filled with chagrin, but made no comment. If Winny had known how she had been described to them as a person of terrible force and vast experience in the reduction to discipline of savage boys and girls, she might have understood their remarkable behaviour; as it was, she felt disconcerted, though not daunted, and as if an instant call

for fatiguing and distressing action were made upon her.

Mrs Peregrine-Hart retired when she had named her offspring—Isobel, Jane, Edward and Clara. And Miss Hesketh observing that the table was set for tea, and a vacant chair before the tray, assumed that here she was to preside over the tea-pot, and seated herself accordingly. Isobel confronted her with knitted brows that lowered like a thunder-cloud over a pair of very handsome dark blue eyes. Her features were singularly fine, her hair black and her figure cast in the mould of a young Roman girl. She was between twelve and thirteen, but looked older. Jane was fair, and less noticeable. Edward was a male copy of his eldest sister. Clara was a little child of six, another likeness of Isobel. These three were true Peregrine-Harts; the fair daughter took after their milder mother.

The presence of the stranger, and her air of weary composure, exerted a controlling influence over the young bears, who watched her as real bears might watch a keeper with-

out a whip. And they did not talk so much as growl in a whisper. Once Winny's lips parted in an irresistible smile; the scene struck her as comic, notwithstanding the painful future scenes it foreshadowed. Wild creatures are always suspicious. Isobel reddened and muttered (muttering was her trick) 'What is there to grin at?' Then as if suddenly aware of some want at table, she rose and pulled the bell, and went on pulling until a neat, scared maid-servant presented herself, when she cried out with a rough imperiousness: 'Mamma ordered a roast chicken for tea. Why is it not here?' The maid vanished, and in a trice returned with the chicken and plates, and set them down opposite her young mistress, who carved the bird in a fashion of her own, and sent Miss Hesketh the liver-wing with half the breast annexed, and took no notice when she expostulated that the wing was enough. She then gave her brother the other wing and a leg apiece to Jane and Clara, but helped herself to nothing until the stranger had declined any more. The other three bears

then thrust forward their plates, asking again, and having equitably divided the eatable substance of what remained, Isobel got the backbone for her share. Winny with satisfaction reflected that if this girl was untamed, she was not selfish, and in spite of her glooming brow, was half attracted to like her.

Immediately there was an end of the meal the bears escaped out of doors, and their dismayed keeper sat still in her chair ruminating. She was in a spacious, old-fashioned parlour, with two windows, and an outlook westward over a retired part of the garden between the red stems of tall ranks of pines. Within there was everything necessary for schoolroom use, but nothing for ease, comfort, or indulgence.

Her countenance not a little fallen, Winny betook herself to her bedroom—a room at the further end of a long gallery on which all the principal bedrooms opened. And here, O dolour, O vexation and futile wrath! were two narrow, neatly appointed white beds, one for Isobel and the other for her. This arrangement,

in direct violation of the privacy for which she had stipulated when signing articles, was explained and extenuated during the few minutes Mrs Peregrine-Hart had given to her introduction into her new day and night quarters—‘It shall be altered if your objection is insuperable, but we trust you will bear with it. Dear Isobel is too tyrannical to be left in the charge of poor old nurse any longer, and her papa and I are most anxious that she should begin to be broken of her naughty ways. If it cannot be done at home, she will have to go to school. Three governesses have left us within the last year, and she is warned that she must reform under you, or prepare for the worst. Her papa and myself are determined to uphold your authority, and to leave her entirely to your management. Your predecessors’ system of appealing to us on every occasion was not fair.’

‘If I cannot rule in my schoolroom without appealing to any one, I will give up my situation,’ said Miss Hesketh.

As Winny recalled this exposition of facts, given within half an hour of her arrival at

Hauxwell, she felt as if she were launched into an unexplored, horrid world of contention. She leant on the open window-sill for ten despondent minutes, wondering what she should do. But the summer evening was very tranquil, and its tranquillity imperceptibly quelled her perturbation. It returned in some measure when Isobel appeared, attended by the maid. She halted in the doorway, and asked with what was deference in her : ' May I come in ? It is my bedtime.'

' Yes. I will leave you the room to yourself for half an hour. Is that long enough ?'

' It will do. I have not slept here before—which bed do you choose ?'

' This one, with its head next the window.' Isobel had intended that bed to be hers, but she offered no remark, and when Winny returned to take possession of it, she was either asleep or feigning with her face to the wall.

When Miss Hesketh had been six weeks, or thereabouts, at Hauxwell, she had made all

the discoveries that were to be made into the habits and customs of the young Peregrine-Harts. Isobel was the leader and moving spirit. What she did the rest imitated. Taken collectively they were as fatiguing a batch of pupils as ever fell to a poor young lady's lot. Isobel had a character to keep up for daring anything and everything against her governess, and her pride was concerned not to permit her reformation to be otherwise than a slow and uneasy process. With her roughness and restiveness Miss Hesketh could bear, but with a propensity to be cruel that she had Miss Hesketh could not and would not bear, and this was the first great question on which they joined issue to try who was the stronger.

Isobel professed not to know that she was cruel, and derided Miss Hesketh's pitiful temper as town-bred cowardice, unbecoming a country girl. Of Isobel's venturesomeness amongst dogs, horses, and horned cattle, Miss Hesketh had nothing to say, but she had given standing orders that the small deer caught

in traps should be reserved for her to witness their destruction in leisure moments, and when Winny found this out her wrath was eloquent, and her counter-orders were stringent. Isobel tried to maintain her prerogative by violence and by craft, but higher commands to obey Miss Hesketh were issued, and Miss Hesketh was obeyed. Isobel revenged herself by promulgating an opinion that their new governess was a poor timid thing; and the younger ones adopted it, and it became fun to them to practise on the fears with which they credited her. Her courage was not of the same coarse quality as theirs, but they soon found out that she had courage enough for her occasions, and that whatever she feared, she did not fear any of them. Still, gusts of emotion with the strain of habitual over-fatigue will tell on the best-nerved frames, and Winny Hesketh felt often, when night came after a weary day, that the chances she would be worsted at her task were multiplying very fast against her. She was not enamoured of either retreat or defeat, it would be a mortification to

avow herself beaten ; but when she began to start at sudden sounds, to lose her appetite, her sleep, and to dread the morning, she began to reflect that this was not like herself, that it was the consequence of worry, not of work, and that no triumph over difficulty was worth the loss of health and strength.

The last straw that broke her patience was a message from Mr Peregrine-Hart which Isobel brought her one noon in extraordinary glee : ‘ O Miss Hesketh, they are drawing the woods to-day, and papa says will you give us a holiday, and take us all to the field below the new plantation to see it.’

Winny had not much idea of what drawing the woods meant, and asked. Isobel had witnessed it often enough to give her a lively description, and Miss Hesketh’s message back was that she would not go. Mrs Peregrine-Hart arrived to present a remonstrance. There was nothing cruel in the business ; it was necessary, she said, that the woods should be cleared of game and vermin at that season. Winny answered that of its necessity she did not pre-

sume to judge, but the spectacle would be painful and disgusting to her, and any pleasure the children might take in it would be better denied them. The end of it was that the children were left to their own choice whether they would go or stay. Isobel and Clara went; Jane and Edward appeared at lesson-time after luncheon, and had their lessons remitted to amuse themselves in some other way. And Winny spent ten minutes of her leisure in writing half-a-dozen lines to their parents (it was ever easier to her to write than to speak) begging to resign her engagement. She had lost all hope of success in her vocation at Hauxwell, and must prepare to go on her travels again. She was sorry for the conclusion, she knew that her mother would be more than sorry, but she felt, just then, as if there were no alternative.

It had been a source of speculation to Miss Hesketh how two persons of manners so mild as Mr and Mrs Peregrine-Hart could be the parents of a progeny so ruthless. Mr Peregrine-Hart had the features of his ancestors, but was

the quietest, civil man she had ever known. Few words served him, and Winny had not heard his voice a score of times before this evening, when about nine o'clock, he knocked at the schoolroom door, and came to answer her note in person.

He stood on the rug with his back to the fire, and began to say that he was satisfied with her success amongst his children, so was his wife, and why could not she be the same? If more money would persuade her to stay, she should have it.

Winny declined more money, her salary was liberal enough—that was no part of her motive in wishing to leave. She found her situation too wearing. ‘There are days,’ she said, ‘when Isobel will do nothing without a running fight of argument. The others follow her example, and in the evening, when they go down to dessert, I am so jaded that I could drop asleep.’ She looked like it now, and pale, as if suffering the reaction after excitement.

‘Then drop asleep. The best thing you can do,’ said the gentleman. ‘It is what

I do myself after a hard day with the hounds.'

'Again—I have no chance with the girls when you encourage them to indulge a cruel taste which is odious to me.'

'They made themselves very disagreeable to-day—put themselves in peril of the guns. Take a month to reconsider your decision.'

This was not the answer Miss Hesketh expected, but she was not dissatisfied with it. Mr Peregrine-Hart cast his silent observation round the room, and went away. The next morning the easiest of old sofas was found standing by the fireside, and Clara said it came out of papa's own snugger. The next evening when Jane appeared to say good-night, she brought the *Evening Mail*. 'Papa hopes that you have had your nap, and are ready for the paper,' said she. 'You are to have it regularly. It comes three times a week.' The newspaper was a ray of light breaking through gloom and dulness. Winny understood that her hard service was to be alleviated, and made

as tolerable as the circumstances admitted. Her fluctuating spirits rose to the appeal, and she felt cheered for a renewed effort.

When the month of probation was almost over Isobel inquired whether she was going to leave them.

‘Would you prefer me to leave or to remain? It depends on you,’ said Winny.

‘I wish you to remain. I like you, Miss Hesketh.’

‘You have very peculiar ways of showing it. Tell me—why were you so trying to-day?’

‘I don’t know. Sometimes I hate you, I could strike you! You are so quiet, and I have to obey you.’

‘It would be bedlam broke loose if I stormed as you storm—and Edward and Clara copying you. And you can be so generous and loving! You must belong to those women whose souls are made out of the sea—all rage and tempest one hour, the next all calm and sunshine.’

Isobel said nothing to this, but it came to be

tacitly understood that Miss Hesketh would try to stay on again. She did stay, by no means always in a placid or resigned humour. With what affectionate regret did she look back to the peaceful, monotonous days at Hall Green! What a long thought did she send sometimes after Mr Durant, wandering she knew not where! Insensibly her life had fallen into a lower key since she had lost him; and that was all the acknowledgment she ever made to the perverse little god who had captured her heart for the wanton triumph of throwing its treasure away. Isobel asked sometimes what ailed her when she sat so still, gazing at the sunset down the valley. She would say nothing ailed her—she was resting.

The sense of weariness and the desire for rest increased upon her all that winter. She ascribed the influence to her tedious, troublesome pupils; but it is doubtful whether she would not have felt it quite as much with full liberty to be at ease and idle. At Hauxwell she had not that liberty. Mrs Peregrine-Hart requested her company in the drawing-room

on an evening when she had some very fine company—lords and ladies, even a prince and princess. Winny wished to be excused on the plea of nothing to wear, but Isobel interposed: ‘Don’t let her off, mamma; she has a very pretty dress.’ That was the dress she had danced in at Mildred Hutton’s wedding, and with touching reluctance she put it on. Old nurse helped her, and eked out its deficiencies with a scarf belonging to her mistress.

‘Dear missis likes to keep up proper distinctions, and she would always have the governess to put on a scarf,’ said she.

‘A hood and tippet if desirable,’ quoth Winny indifferently.

She descended to the drawing-room. There was a nice fire, a nice ottoman in front of it, and a collection of very nice soft cushions. It was her now accustomed hour to take a nap. In a few seconds she was oblivious. When she next opened her eyes two ladies were talking across her, there was a great illumination, there

was a large party playing a round game at a loo-table.

‘There, she’s woke up! I have been keeping them all from waking you!’ cried Clara springing from the rug where she had been crouched on guard. Her mamma whispered: ‘Hush,’ and an old man with white hair and gleaming black eyes said: ‘Poor little thing, she’s tired with whipping you all day.’ Winny emerged from her drowsy confusion with a blush. Mrs Peregrine-Hart invited her to join the round game, but the round game in progress did not admit of interlopers. Then came tea, and beautiful music and sweet singing—Winny rather enjoyed her evening on the whole. A fat lady said to her confidentially: ‘I hear you have written a book—what headaches it must have given you!’ and then she called to a thin gentleman to tell him: ‘This is the lady who has written a book.’ They both seemed to contemplate her with respectful, amused curiosity, and a handsome lad who stood near expressed it openly: ‘How funny! I had an

idea that ladies who wrote books wore turbans and shoes down at heel!’ Winny laughed, and showed a neat little bronze kid slipper with a smart rosette: ‘For the credit of my order,’ said she, and the lad bowed a merry apology.

Isobel said to her governess afterwards with some diffidence: ‘They all shook hands with you to-night when they went away. They never did with Miss Rogers.’

‘I’ll endeavour to bear the honour meekly,’ was Winny’s reply.

Miss Hesketh’s countenance and character did not invite those impertinences of which there has been often complaint amongst dependents, but the fact that she had written a book did give her a degree more of consideration here than she would have enjoyed as only the children’s governess. She was not absolutely insensible to the pleasure and uses of such appreciation; for Isobel had a certain imitative-ness that led her to measure her deference by the deference of her elders and betters, and Winny was thankful for any innocent lever of motive

that gave her power and authority with this fractious girl. But it was from Miss Denham that she got the most effectual aid by way of advice. Winny did not make a practice of telling her professional troubles—to her mother she never mentioned them—but to Georgie she wrote one day an account of the perplexing humours of her pupil made out of the sea. Georgie bade her friend be indulgent—the poor girl could not help them, suffered far more from them than she did; bade her be wise and make a virtue of necessity, and whenever she saw the signs of a stormy day, to send her out for a ride, give her a holiday, an active game, or an interesting long walk—she would come back sweet as summer, and there would be peace at home. Winny did not find the prescription unfailing, but the method was the most successful of any that it had occurred to her to try. It did seem sometimes to the other children as if Isobel had only to look black to get a reprieve from lessons and a beautiful ride with papa, and it was not a thing to be wondered at that Edward, who also loved a ride, should

try the same device for getting one. He tried it two or three times in vain, and once he tried it so hard that Winny bade him go and tell his papa he felt bad, like Isobel—which he too confidingly did, with a very disagreeable result to himself, and also, in justice to Miss Hesketh it must be said, a result as unexpected by her as by him. But the permanent effect was miraculous, and by Christmas came the school-room was a reformed and quiet scene, and even a popular resort of visitors.

There was five o'clock tea, and as standing guests the baby out of the nursery, a little girl just learning to toddle, and old nurse who had never been beyond Rusdale, and was therefore an original character, full of songs, ballads, traditions, superstitions and quaint oddities of all sorts. Mrs Peregrine-Hart would come herself when alone, and bring up her callers when she found that Miss Hesketh liked it. It was, indeed, a signal relief and diversion to her. She missed the sight of mother and friends, and familiar places, and though she had letters, letters are brief, cold company.

Six months at Hauxwell were longer than a year at Hall Green, and there were nearly six months more to live through before she need expect a change. She made the best of them, and took the bits of brightness and variety that fell within her reach. They were not very many—but then she had no right to expect many in that state of life.

Winter in Rusdale lingered very long. There was snow under the north side of the hedges far on into May. Winny Hesketh watched its slow disappearance, counting the days to mid-summer as she had counted them when a girl at school. One morning, after a heavy rain in the night, the last patch, the last streak were gone, and the sun burst forth warm and genial. ‘And now,’ said she, ‘I hope my cough will go too.’ The cold of Rusdale was keener and more irritating than any cold she had experienced, and since January she had suffered from it rather severely. The milder weather brought her relief, and a little comfort of another sort—a salt-water letter, as the post-mistress called

it: 'And I should guess a valentine, if Valentine's Day was not long over,' said she.

Nevertheless a valentine it was, and it accomplished its mission of making Miss Hesketh laugh, and remember very pleasantly the person who sent it. She knew the writing though she had only two other pieces from the same hand—the note that had come with the basket of myrtle from Rushmead on the morning of the wedding at Foston, and the letter from Southampton on the day Mr Durant sailed for India. She ought to have had another, a letter addressed to her from Bombay, but there had been a wreck, and lost mails, and Winny's letter never reached her. Mr Durant had written his own poetry and painted his own devices, tawny Indian loves and tropical graces — a word of news of her had set him off composing it. It had given him some hours of mirth to concoct, and it gave Winny repeated gleams of amusement. She liked to think of him in such mirthful humour. Perhaps she would rather have had a letter of description and tidings—she did not know that one had been sent and

was lost ; but she was never exacting ; she told herself that she had expected nothing yet, and was the more bound to be thankful for what she had got—and another letter of tidings was on its way.

There was no further event to break the laborious routine of her existence until the holidays, when she went home to Cotham. As holidays came only once a year at Hauxwell they were long when they did come. They began early in June, and Miss Hesketh was not due in her schoolroom again until the end of August. She scarcely knew how weary she was until she began to rest. Rest had not arrived too soon, and could not last too late. She needed it.

CHAPTER XIV.

BETWEEN FRIENDS.

WINNY HESKETH put on her best face for her mother, but when she went to see Miss Denham she let herself go with the ease of old friendship that desires to conceal nothing. Georgie welcomed her with fervour, took off her bonnet, and said : ‘ You are going to stay and have coffee with me, and I’ll take you home before sunset.’ Georgie stirred about the room rather restlessly for a minute or two before she settled, as if something unlooked for had taken her by surprise. That something was Winny’s face—the blithe face, the round and buxom little figure were considerably gone, though so gradually gone that Winny herself was scarcely conscious of the change and loss.

‘ If I might be excused for making a personal

remark, I should say, Winny, that you are burning the candle at both ends,' was Georgie's way of allusion to appearances.

'I have harder work than at Hall Green—almost as hard as at the old Manor School, but I might be much worse off than I am,' was Winny's frank reply. 'I have every comfort, and many indulgences to lighten my days.'

'You teach, and you write a good deal. Oh yes, I can detect you in a moment, though you sign no name. Is it quite wise, Winny, to do both? I find writing takes out of me.'

'It is as easy as breathing yet—I don't know what it may be. Rusdale is full of stories. The sketches and tales I write are mostly true, or spring up from self-sown seed I cannot tell how, but without labour. I should often be dull for want of company if I might not make my thoughts talk. And there is the profit, Georgie—I cannot pretend to despise the profit.'

'Assuredly not—why should you? I wish

I could make any! But you cannot go on teaching hard and writing too. You'll grow thin if you persist in it much longer.'

'I am grown thin already—but that is my cough. I had a cough for weeks after Christmas. Hauxwell stands high, and is very, very cold. There we feel every wind that blows.'

Georgie reflected in silence. 'I have been in Rusdale. It is fine country, but I advise you not to stay if the climate affects you.'

'I will try another winter: if that be as bad as the last I must give up my situation—else it might, perchance, give up me. Oh yes, Georgie, I know, I look forward. I must not sacrifice my health—all the fortune I am possessed of.'

'Dear little Winny! I wish somebody would turn up, and save you the care of it,' said Georgie kindly.

'Do you? I don't. I have no wish to be other than I am, unless free to live at home with my mother; but she will not have me. She fancies I should be dull, and is sure I

could not earn enough to keep me. It is of no use striving against her prejudices. I must wait, and go on working in other people's houses until I am thirty—old Mam'zell's age of independence, when a single woman may lawfully begin to live and work in the way that pleases her best.'

Georgie indulged in a compassionate gesture at Winny's patience, and said : 'How I should hate your bondage!' Then : 'I must tell you—at the risk of being unwise. I heard of Mr Durant last week.'

'Yes! What is his news? We are friends; there is no harm in our being friends?'

'None, none—while he is in India, and you are here.'

'Ah, Georgie, now you are laughing at me! He sent me a valentine that he had written and painted himself—the most laughable pictures. He has a great deal of fun. It was a long while after date, but I was pleased to get it.'

'He is a very good fellow. His news was nothing much; still you will like to hear it. It

came through another man, an engineer, a half-quarter Scotch cousin of mine, who has gone with the expedition. Durant was mentioned as the toughest traveller of them all, and invincible for pluck and spirits. They did not know how they would have made their way without him. He is wonderful 'at disguises and dialects.'

'I don't know half his accomplishments. O Georgie, I hope he'll live to come back to England!' Winny cried.

'Then you will have to moderate your friendship. You need not look at me with those pleading eyes. It would be a delusion and a snare, forbidden of all wise men and prudent women. But never mind for the present, he is not back in England yet, and I permit you to cherish his memory at a distance. I wish his wife were in heaven!'

'O Georgie, don't wish anything so wicked,' remonstrated Winny.

'But, indeed, I do. You know that I was in Wales last summer. I heard the whole story of his marriage from the clergyman of the

place where it happened. What a fool he was!’

‘Amongst all the variety of men’s follies I don’t call Mr Durant’s the worst,’ said Winny.

‘It is almost; for it is one of the irretrievable follies. Take this as a rule—when a young woman offers to throw herself into a mill-stream for love, it will save trouble to let her go, and do it. If it be convenient, you may have a man ready with a pole and hook to fish her out after she has had a cooling. The prescription will apply to the youth of the other sex as well.’

‘You are an advocate for heroic remedies, Georgie. I wonder how you would behave if you were in love.’

‘So do I. I should like to know—for the curiosity of the thing.’ Georgie gazed at the buckles of her shoes with admirable serenity for the space of a minute, then slowly all over her face warmed a delightful blush. Winny’s eyes asked an explanation. ‘It signifies nothing but my own thoughts at the absurd idea,’ was Georgie’s reply.

She had great audacity. At that very moment she was engaged to be married, conditionally on her not repenting within a certain rather long period of probation. She believed that she would repent, and she decided not to admit Winny to a knowledge of her interesting position, lest Winny should retaliate when she jibed at Mr Durant. Georgie abhorred being laughed at, though she was not herself always sparing of sarcasm. She turned the conversation to another subject, to matters literary, and produced from a drawer in her writing-table several small rolls of soiled manuscript which Winny recognised as rejected addresses to public editors. Georgie had got nothing accepted yet, and was plaintive about it. She felt convinced that she would succeed if she could once win a hearing. Winny was convinced of it too.

‘Have you anything that has not been up on its approval?’ she asked. ‘A tale of some sort?’

‘Yes—here is one: “Job’s Wife,” and an “Essay on the Providence that defeats our

bad intentions." I prefer the essay myself.'

Winnie was skimming the tale with a rapid eye. 'It is the philosophy of the pole and the hook, I see,' was her comment. 'I am going to send up some pieces of my own, and I will send this with them, if you like. But you have signed it "George."' "George Denham," demurring. 'If I am to take you in tow I should prefer Georgiana.'

'I cannot indulge you, Winnie. "George" is to be my signature. I shall not submit to be lectured by puny critics as an ungrammatical school-girl. I do not much care for appearing in the magazine that suits you, but one must begin somewhere,' and she elevated her chin in her happy, superior, complacent way.

'I should never be surprised if you fell into the critical line yourself, Georgie—you have an incisive style.'

Georgie seemed to reflect, to hesitate, and then, with an embarrassed laugh, produced another soiled roll of manuscript from the drawer, and tossed it into Winnie's lap: 'I

have tried my hand at criticism too. Read that. How do you think it would do?’

Winny complied, and read that. It was a criticism on her own book. Once Georgie made a movement to snatch it out of her hands, but sat down again under a look from Winny.

‘The editor I offered it to sent it back on the plea that he did not agree with it,’ Georgie tittered as her comrade finished the paper, and tossed it over to her. Winny’s visage was rather hot; you would have said she was pained. She was mentally quoting the prayer to be saved from her friends. ‘You are not vext, Winny?’ Georgie said rather compunctiously.

‘Vext? No! We must learn not to quarrel with dispassionate opinions. But you have taught me an evil lesson against yourself—eh?’ Georgie reddened, and fell to remonstrance. ‘Never fear! you shall go scatheless for me. But I am glad the editor, whoever he was, did not agree with that damaging criticism. Don’t protest—I know you did not mean it. You are no worse than the boys pelting the frogs—

sport to you, death to us. But about your name, Georgie. Sign none at all, and then, when you are famous, you may sign your own, and enjoy it.'

But Georgie obstinately adhered to her original intention, and Winny had to yield. She requested the editor's special attention to the work of the new volunteer, and he gave it an attention so special that he printed it, while he returned her articles to Winny for want of room. Georgie chuckled with glee over this result, such a perfect fulfilment of Winny's prediction; and Winny, with magnanimity, congratulated her friend, and bade her go on and prosper. She hoped for better luck herself next time; and having pretty tales and sketches to dispose of meanwhile, she sought other pages to fill, and found them.

Mrs Hesketh was sorry to see that Winny was as much and more than ever devoted to her idle scribbling these holidays—the widow had not changed or modified her judgment about it one iota. Perhaps she had a pride in remaining of the same opinion. Whether she

had read Winny's book or not Winny did not inquire, and her mother did not inform her. But it was to be had at the public library, and to intimate old friends like Mrs Knox and Miss Baxter, she had plainly stated her disapprobation. It seemed that they coincided with her; for they observed a strict silence. Also to Mrs Wedge, a clergywoman of Low Church persuasion, who visited the district including Castle Green, the widow had revealed her trouble, and Winny heard of it again in a pious homily from that lady, which struck her as the height of impertinence. Mrs Fleetwood, grown infirm now, and confined to her easy-chair, was the only person who offered Winny, as an authoress, any countenance, and that was slight before folks: no more than a furtive wink. As much as to say that being in a minority of one against the saints, she must go softly in the error of her ways.

But in a private moment she committed herself to livelier counsels of encouragement. 'My dear Winny, prize yourself more!' cried she, struggling with shortness of breath to be em-

phatic. 'Never hold yourself cheap. The world takes us all at our own valuation, and the self-asserting people get the best of it. It has not leisure to look into their claims, and passes them without investigation. Assert yourself, my dear, assert yourself!'

But Winny only sat still. She did not care enough for general approbation to levy it perforce; if it reached her as a voluntary, spontaneous contribution, well and good, but she was very unlikely to seek it. But Georgie demanded praise, exacted it as her due, and she had it abundantly. Her clever father put on his spectacles, and read her production aloud to her delighted family, who laughed and cried, and discovered in it traits of the finest humour and pathos. The fact that she had entered upon a literary career was announced to the most distant of the family connections as a fact to be proud of, and at home she was honoured and privileged like an eldest son.

'What do you think! I have bought a ledger to paste in it all her articles, and the

notices out of the papers !' her sister mentioned to Winny in accents of jubilation.

'A little flattery will do her no harm,' said Winny, quietly amused. 'Georgie works the better for cordial appreciation.'

Georgie's sister thought it rather nice of Winny not to be jealous or envious ; but Winny was quite prepared to see Georgie pass her without the least feeling of outrivalry. Her penny-fee of flattery was to be derived from strangers, or almost strangers. Mr Caleb meeting her in the street one day, gave her a painfully hard squeeze of the hand, with congratulatory nods, and promises to enrich her repository of strange and moving incidents from his own experience.

'I fell in with your book at the London Library—they take no trash there,' said he. 'I can tell you queer stories without end, real, live stories.' Winny did not doubt it. She only doubted whether the queer stories would be much in her way.

The next morning the old painter called at Mrs Hesketh's house, and was shown into the

parlour where Winny sat amidst billows of muslin curtains, sewing on rings for her mother. He called to invite Winny to go to London—a wonderful and charming shock of surprise—he lived in London now more than in Cotham, though he still kept up his establishment at the north end of Castle Green.

‘You are not acquainted with Mrs Caleb, but I’ll introduce you, and we will show you something of life,’ said he briskly. ‘We return to town on Monday. Think about it, and say you will come.’

Winny’s countenance said for her frankly how much she would like to come, and when Mrs Caleb appeared, a homely little woman, much younger than her husband, but equally cordial, and anxious to second his invitation, she accepted it. The widow Hesketh wore a very reserved air about it, but she could not deny that it was kind, and she did not refuse her consent.

‘Why, you are going to be a lion!’ Miss Denham said, quizzing her, when Winny re-

ported her happy fortune. 'Buy a black net bonnet and a black net dress, and they will see you through your frolic.'

'But I hate black—it does not suit me,' said Winny.

'Then go in your straw-plait and white frocks, and look like a country mawkin! I wish I were in your place. I adore London. Perhaps we may meet there—my worthy friends, the Harvey-Phillipps', are quick at seeing my desires and deservings. If you have the chance, mind you go to see Mario in 'Faust.' That is the most valuable recommendation I can give you for the present season.'

CHAPTER XV.

WINNY REVISITS LONDON.

MR CALEB'S house in town was not three minutes' walk from Mr Hayland's—only just round the corner in another street. Winny Hesketh was made aware of this by a letter that Aunt Agnes wrote to her in reply to her announcement that she was about to revisit London: 'The Calebs are almost next door to us. You must drop in as soon as you can; and we should like to have you altogether for a week or two before you go back to Cotham. Dear Lucy is quite impatient to see you since she has heard you are coming.' Winny was in as much glee over her anticipated visits as she ever was over anything now.

Her mother said: 'Your two months will run away very fast. And you have promised

to go to Southmead too.' Southmead was the residence of Mr and Mrs Frank Jarvis at Skipton.

'I must stay with Mildred on my way home,' Winny said.

Her mother was not unthankful that she should have opportunities of change and amusement. Her life seemed but a dull life on the whole. One morning while she was still on Castle Green, she received that Indian letter which was on its road when she got her valentine. The widow asked her whence it was, and Winny told her.

It is probable that recent events had afforded to Mrs Hesketh fresh light by which to review those maxims and theories on which she had striven to mould her daughter's principles and rule her conduct. Not that she ever changed her formulas or admitted that she had spoken hard sentences; but her air, her actions, a certain downcast sad look she had expressed inward doubt and, perhaps, recantation. Winny was sorry for her mother. She saw that she was grieving. Her method of

consolation was to bid her not grieve for what could not be helped.

‘There is a fate in it, mother,’ said she with a pathetic carelessness. ‘Don’t fret for me—it is quite sure that I shall never entangle myself in the toils of matrimony now. I remember long ago how Mildred Hutton predicted that I should fall in love perversely as a punishment for my pride. But I would rather keep my trouble, such as it is, than never have had it; and it is not so sore but that it might be a great deal worse.’

‘You talk nonsense, Winny. It is doing you harm. It weighs on your spirits. Oh, you need not tell me! I know what that trouble does,’ rejoined her mother. ‘You must try to forget it.’

Winny did not try to forget it. She cherished it as a possession, rather; and did not recognise that it could do her a mischief. She still enjoyed the sight of the sun, and of all things that the sun shone upon. Nevertheless, the change that had struck Miss Denham was too marked to be long dissembled before her

mother's eyes. The morning she left Cotham to go to London she was cheerful, but the buoyant vivacity of her girlishness was gone—there was even a degree of effort to keep up, and when the moment of parting arrived she had to drop her veil over her face to hide her tears. They kept each other in view to the last. Winny was thinking that her mother's figure had lost a little of its erectness; and the widow was reflecting how time stood still with neither of them.

That evening, however, sitting round the library fire at Mr Caleb's (the old painter loved a fire at dusk, let the season be what it might) Winny was quite pleasantly gay. Mr Cairns had been invited to dinner to make a fourth, and the conversation was all about Cotham and Cotham folks. Mrs Caleb had a long memory for social histories, and was delighted to astonish Winny Hesketh with revelations respecting her neighbours at home. Mr Caleb had, now and then, to moderate the indiscretion of her too frank disclosures. Mr Cairns seemed to

colour sometimes as he heard her. He was a quiet young fellow—too young yet to be quite free from uneasy recollections of his humble origin, but rising into repute and prosperity fast.

‘I was at Cotham for Christmas. My mother was saying that she had not seen you she did not know when, Miss Hesketh,’ he told Winny. ‘She thinks you have forgotten your way to our house.’

‘I have not forgotten it—but I live away from Cotham now, up in Rusdale, and am only there for my holidays. I am a governess, you know?’

‘Yes—I understood so from your brother Dick.’

Winny inquired if he saw much of Dick. Not much, the young artist said; in London people did not see much of one another unless similar occupations brought them together.

‘We will ask Dick Hesketh to dine on Sunday, and you shall come and meet him,’ said Mr Caleb heartily. But Cairns regretted that he was engaged elsewhere, and Winny knew by his manner that he was not anxious

to renew his intimacy with her brother. Mr Caleb said no more of inviting Dick.

Old times in Cotham turned up for discussion, and Winny asked Mr Caleb if he had known her father. 'If I knew him? Of course, I knew him—a bit of the best company I ever did know; but too merry to be always wise.'

'And you knew my mother too, then?' Winny inquired further.

'That does not follow. We were in awe of Mrs Hesketh. She was a very pretty woman, but there was too much grit in her composition to let her be easy with us light-hearted bachelors.'

'Before he married me, he often heard the chimes at midnight,' said Mrs Caleb, shaking a reprehensive head at her husband, who nodded her back a defiance, and threatened to hear them often again if she dared to make herself awful to him.

'I will not make myself awful to you,' said she.

'I don't fear that you will,' said he. They

were, in fact, a couple quite devoted to each other's comfort.

At a quarter to ten Mr Cairns went away to put in his appearance at a late reception before going home to bed.

'He is getting over it,' was the mysterious comment of his hostess as soon as he had retired.

'Getting over it, indeed! He can scarcely contain his sensations of relief and blessedness,' cried the old painter.

'Now that is too bad—I am sure he felt it very much at the time,' persisted Mrs Caleb with a sentimental air.

'Humph! An artist cannot make a worse mistake than to marry when he is a youngster. I am very glad Miss Cracknell neglected to mend that rent in her petticoat.'

'It was not in her petticoat—it was in the parlour-curtain. But Miss Hesketh must wonder what we are talking about—she may as well know—perhaps, she could give consolation. *She*, at any rate, is as neat as a new pin!'

‘I don’t think there is a rent in my petticoat,’ said Winny.

‘I daresay not. Let me tell my tale. When Cairns came to London he was nineteen, and engaged to Miss Maria Cracknell—you know Cracknell’s the confectioner’s, at the corner of Castle Gate? She was about twenty-three, fat and not at all nice-looking. Ill-educated, too, and vulgar, but good-natured’——

‘*You* are not very good-natured, my dear,’ interrupted Mr Caleb.

‘Who talked of a rent in her petticoat? Certainly not *I*.’

‘No, my dear. It was *I*. Go on—Miss Hesketh’s eyes are shining with innocent curiosity. She shall stand for a model of Eve.’

‘Miss Hesketh shall do nothing of the kind—don’t be impertinent, sir.’

‘Miss Hesketh does not think me impertinent—she discerns the flattering implication. Miss Hesketh is very clever.’

Winny laughed, blushed, and intimated her wish to hear Mrs Caleb’s story to the end. The lady proceeded.

‘The moral of it is “a stitch in time saves nine.” It was on a day last Christmas that Cairns went to visit his lady-love, and espied a little slit in the parlour-curtain. For that time he said nothing. When next he called, the slit had grown a yard long, and he asked his lazy dear Maria if she did not think she ought to mend that curtain. His lazy Maria was huffed. He coolly proposed to bid her good-bye. She as coolly took him at his word, and said good-bye and a good riddance too, if he were so mighty fine and particular. Perhaps he was a little tired of her before—but that was the conclusion of a five years’ engagement.’

‘I don’t believe he cried much—or had much reason to cry,’ said Winny, more amused than touched.

‘He did not cry at all—unless when she sent him in a prodigious bill for raspberry tarts,’ said Mr Caleb.

‘That bill for raspberry tarts is pure fiction, invented for a hit at Cairns’ close-fistedness,’ asseverated his wife.

‘Is he close-fisted?’ Winny asked with a sudden illumination on his manifest avoidance of her brother Dick.

‘He is very prudent. He cannot endure a poor fellow down on his luck. We all have our pet weakness, but avarice is not a common vice amongst our tribe. Cairns pleads that a man is known by the company he keeps, and he has no taste for the company of Bohemians.’

‘Small blame to him there. You are not over fond of them yourself. But does Miss Hesketh know what a Bohemian is?’ Mrs Caleb said with a glance of inquiry at the young lady from the country.

‘If she does not, she soon can know,’ said the old painter. ‘I have promised to show her something of life.’

Winny had not long to wait or far to go to learn what a Bohemian is. The next morning at breakfast Mr Caleb remarked that he supposed she was in a hurry to see her brother, and as he had business in the same quarter he would convoy her to Dick’s door, and call for

her again to escort her to the Academy when his business was done. Winny conjectured from what she knew of her brother that the uncertainty of finding him if she called by chance was not much greater than if she called by appointment, so she acquiesced in the arrangement, and was left at his lodgings about nine o'clock. The woman of the house said in reply to Mr Caleb's inquiry: No, Mr Hesketh was not gone out yet: and, in fact, the young man was not up from his bed yet. Dick had always been fond of his bed in the morning, as Winny well remembered. Nearly an hour elapsed before he could prevail on himself to appear. Winny had plenty of time to make her reflections. She had heard from Dick that he had furnished his lodgings himself, and he had not furnished them without comforts. His sister was in possession of a superior easy chair, and the fellow to it faced her. There was a piano. There was a small billiard-table. There was an unfinished game at chess, the chess-men in ivory of oriental carving. There were engravings of high class upon the walls to show that

Dick had a 'taste—perhaps, Dick's comforts surprised his sister.

By and by an untidy little girl brought up his breakfast. Ten minutes longer Winny had the pleasure of contemplating his coffee-pot, new loaf and fresh butter, and then, at last, Dick came himself. Winny's eyes were accustomed to the nicety of gentlemen, and Dick was slippered and unshorn. Winny coloured as he kissed her, and thought, if this was the aspect of Bohemians, young Cairns was not altogether wrong in avoiding their association. Then she felt very sorry for Dick; very kind and pitiful, though it was his own fault. His visage was sleepy; he groaned, and yawned, and stretched himself. His slumbers had been prematurely disturbed. His sister guessed that he had not been in bed until after twelve o'clock last night. Dick drily avowed that he had not—he never was in bed until after twelve o'clock—unless she meant twelve o'clock at noon.

Winny's heart sank. She was distressed, perplexed, not liking to ask questions, nor, indeed, knowing what questions to ask. Dick

was never communicative of his affairs. At last she said: 'Have you nothing to tell me, Dick?'

'What should I have to tell? It is you that must have news,' was his answer with a touch of sullenness; and he sat down to his late breakfast.

Winny resumed her cheerfulness with an effort. 'Well, then, for my news: I am staying with the Calebs this week, and next week I move on to Uncle Hayland's.'

'Staying with the Calebs! How come you to be there? Has the old man taken a wife, and set up house in London?'

'Yes. It was my having written a book brought them to call upon me at home, and then they invited me to town for a glimpse of the world. So good of them—and even mother could not object. So here I am—prepared to enjoy whatever comes in my way.'

'I have read better books than yours, Winny, and I have read worse,' said Dick with brotherly candour. 'I like your short stories pretty well,

but I agree with mother that it would be best to stick to your teaching. If I could not be in the first rank of literature or art, I would rather be nowhere.'

'I must thank God for giving me a disposition to be satisfied with small things,' said Winny, and sighed and winced a little at the uncompromising quality of the family criticism. Then she mentioned, for a diversion of the subject, having seen Mr Cairns the previous evening.

'Cairns? Ah, Cairns is aiming for the top o' the tree,' said Dick in his accent of discontent. 'He will be in the Academy before long—he has a picture on the line now, sold, too. He is a bit of a genius, is Cairns, and will hardly look at a poor fellow like me now-a-days. If mother had kept me at school, and given me as good an education as she gave you, I might have got on as well as Cairns. What was to hinder me?'

Winny was never more astonished than by this speech of Dick's. It was her turn to be candid. 'Be fair to mother, Dick—she did her

duty to both of us as far as we would let her. You were long enough at the Grammar School if you had chosen to learn, but you were always a lazy, idle boy—and you are lazy and idle still, and that is what ails you, that you don't get on. Besides, education does not make a genius—Cairns was born one.'

Dick was not affronted. He laughed, and rose from his finished breakfast, extending his arms wearily still: 'If Cairns was born a genius so was I born a lazy, idle boy,' said he, and cast himself at full length into the easy chair which he rolled to the window. After staring out for a minute at the very few and limited objects of observation that the street afforded, he gazed with an air of scrutiny at Winny, and asked if her bonnet was quite the thing. It was a fine white dunstable, trimmed with maize-coloured ribbons and ears of barley.

'It is quite the thing for the country, Dick; I always wear a straw bonnet,' said she; but she thought of Miss Denham's advice.

'You old maid! beginning to talk of always

wearing one sort of bonnet. Does anybody tell you you are pretty?’

‘Nobody, Dick. I don’t live much in the way of flattering speeches—but I am glad if you think so,’ and Winny almost blushed.

‘You are pretty—a great deal too pretty to be mewed up in a schoolroom all the days of your life. But you have got no money, and I am afraid that will have to be your lot. Fellows run after the girls with money—they cannot afford to marry without. I cannot myself.’

Winny looked at her brother with eyes running over with laughter, and thought if her choice lay between wasting her sweetness on the desert air of spinsterdom, and spending it on a man like himself, she would most surely die in the wilderness. The sight of Dick was a disenchantment. If their mother had been familiar with such a drowsy morning face and figure in their poor father who was dead, no wonder that she promulgated warnings against rash entrance into the bonds of matrimony! Winny could not have lived with such a mate—he would have broken her heart—so she told

herself. And yet she felt a passion of pity for Dick—yearning pangs of natural affection that could avail him nothing. Ignorant as she was of young men's lives in London, she could discern that Dick's was not a good life; that he was slipping all down hill, and very fast too.

Dick would not encounter Mr Caleb when he returned for Winny, but sent her quickly away downstairs. 'Tell him I am engaged—say I am just going out—I shall see you again when you are in Welbeck Street, and I'll take you to anything you please then.' He was peremptory to be rid of her, and Winny did not vex him by lingering. But neither did she make his excuses to Mr Caleb—that was not necessary. The old painter had discernment. Winny's countenance was overcast, and her spirits were subdued. She did not mention her brother, and Mr Caleb, who had known a score of Dick Heskeths in his time, was at no loss to guess why.

They went to the Academy, and saw pictures, and Winny forgot her new trouble for the time.

But that sort of trouble which is driven into the shade when fresh and lively interests prevail has a trick of re-appearing so often. Winny was perpetually conscious of it as a depressing influence and an abatement of her pleasure. Though Mr Caleb said nothing to her about Dick, his wife was not so reticent.

‘Mr Caleb fears that you have not much satisfaction in your brother—young men are often a great plague,’ she said with the good intention of administering comfort, *minus* the tact. Winny was not of a mind to discuss Dick with Mrs Caleb. That lady went on : ‘It is an immense drawback to girls when their fathers and brothers are a discredit to them. I have a dear friend, Lizzie Crofton, whose father is a dreadful character :—last season I was in hopes that Sandford (you know the name, the portrait-painter) had serious thoughts of her, and I dropped him a word of encouragement. He was round enough : ‘There is not a nicer girl in London than Lizzie Crofton, but a man would have to be very far gone to dream of marrying into that family’—and he has married

a girl out of Essex since. Then Mrs Griffith's only son has just got into mischief—he is on bail now; but it is a terrible thing for his sisters.'

Winny had grown pale, but she smiled bravely as she answered: 'Dick is not a dreadful character, nor has he got into any terrible mischief. He was brought up in honest principles, but he is deficient in energy. He will hardly be a prosperous man, but I do not live in fear that he will disgrace us.' Winny had correctly formulated her floating ideas about Dick in this speech on the impulse of the moment. She knew the advantage and enjoyment that she might have derived from her brother had he been in propitious circumstances, well-liked and respected, and considerate for her; but that was not Dick, and girls cannot change their brothers, they can only make the best of them. The tears sprang to her eyes at this thought, but she resolutely winked them away.

'I would not fret about him whatever he is, or is to be,' Mrs Caleb with dispassionate philo-

sophy advised. 'We are going to Mrs Gofton's reception to-night, so pray don't make your eyes red.'

Winny did not make her eyes red. She endeavoured, and not unsuccessfully, to cheer up, and put her trouble behind her. Mrs Gofton's reception was something quite novel, and amused her exceedingly—it was the first grand party, as she naively observed, to which she had ever been where there was not room for everybody to sit down, or even to get indoors, at once. It was a warm summer evening, and the company overflowed into the verandah and into the garden. There were present many celebrities in literature and art, both native and foreign, at whom Winny gazed with much respect, and some surprise that they were not more unlike common people. An amiable editor was there with whom she had a correspondence; he engaged her in talk, and told her who was who, and finally introduced her to a lady of benevolent aspect, wearing a jewel on her forehead, who made her sit down on a little wicker chair by the red couch she nearly

filled. Then Winny had to tell whence she came, and what she had done, and was admonished that the scribbling which she found so easy now would grow hard as any other work for a living by and by ; and that she would soon have to choose between it and her teaching, which she would give up. And the same said another notable lady, of a younger generation, whose literary productions Winny had a vast admiration for. Winny was very sprightly in her answers, and Mr Caleb was pleased to be inquired of who was that charming bit of sunshine that he had brought to Mrs Gofton's reception. Winny thought a great deal of this evening's entertainment. She was quite right to do so. It was a sample that had to serve her a long while. She never went to another. It was a feature of her experience that her pleasant times never repeated themselves.

A private view of pictures at a noble house, a visit to the play, to the opera (not 'Faust' with Mario in it), a tea-drinking at the amiable

editor's, and a Sunday afternoon at a suburban cottage where lived and wrote that notable literary lady who was Winny's admiration, brought her week's stay with the Calebs to a conclusion. It seemed a week as long as two, for the constant succession of new faces and strange things that she had seen in the course of it.

At her Uncle Hayland's, life was taken much more quietly. Very little amusement was possible there. Lucy, without any pronounced ailment, had developed into a confirmed invalid; and Mr Hayland was in a similar way, though he ate and slept well, and took his walks as regularly as clock-work. Aunt Agnes was genteel as ever; Herbert was absent from home, and Ellen was a brisk, busy bee in the household, everybody's patient, affectionate little care-taker.

Winny had her first hours there with Lucy alone. She was not sorry. Lucy was ever her favourite cousin; the one she was most unlike, yet the most in sympathy with. Poor Lucy, she went more and more softly—a fading figure, a sweet voice, a heavenly countenance. The

others had each some call of pious duty to obey. 'Leave Cousin Winny with me—we will entertain each other until you come back,' Lucy said. 'I will play you some of the music that you used to love.' Winny acquiesced with a sad, amused recollection of those Sunday evenings long ago when Lucy's sweet, sacred music exorcised her fractious humours.

It was about the middle of the afternoon, and the muslin curtains were closed over the windows to make a shade from the sultry midsummer heat, but the incessant roll and rumble of carriages filled the air with dusty turmoil. Winny ceased speaking at intervals, waiting for it to pass. Lucy smiled, and reminded her that she was in London.

'It is the height of the season, the noisiest time of the year,' she said. 'Papa has consented to go to the sea next month for my sake—but I do not expect it will be of any use. What an enviable little mortal *you* are, Cousin Winny! you breathe of the fresh country air—you make me think of sweet-brier!' She took Winny's face in her two hands, and kissed her,

French fashion, on both cheeks, as if she enjoyed it. She was in an expansive mood—Winny seemed no stranger, though it was years since they had met. ‘Do you remember the big pears in the doctor’s garden at Avranches? I wish we were there this hot, thirsty afternoon! Those six months at Avranches were the happiest months of my life. I often think of them, often!’

Then she opened the piano, and played between-whiles as they talked together. It was just the same music as she played in the old upstairs parlour on Castle Green—long-drawn, melodious chords to set holy thoughts to. Winny listened in a dream—once Lucy looked round in her face, wondered what her eyes meant, and played on silently until a low sigh warned her that Winny was awake again, and restored to the present. Probably Lucy’s life was, on the whole, duller than Winny’s; she had suffered no disappointment, resisted no temptation, been set to no toil that could be talked of. Her experience was bounded by sensations of disease, never violently painful,

and by depression of spirits that never increased beyond the tediousness of the day, or the power of a little variety to lighten it. From her point of view, the life of her Cousin Winny was quite a business, a scene of changes, labours, anxieties.

Lucy was justified in her private reflection that Winny would not have cared to change shoes with her. After a turn or two amongst old reminiscences, they began to speak of later, maturer days. Lucy was the chief inquirer.

‘Tell me how the world has used you, Cousin Winny. I shall not tell again, but I have a fancy to know. I always thought you would turn out good and happy, though you were a restive, unlucky little girl.’

‘The world has used me fairly, so far. I am restive still—that is, I am not compliant against my will. As for luck—I don’t know whether I have much luck to boast of—it is my disposition to be easily satisfied; and I am sure it is foolish to cry for the moon.’

‘That is something achieved! All my life I

have been weakly crying for the moon, and so has mamma.'

'*You*, Cousin Lucy! while I believed the song of your heart to be one of constant resignation!'

'It was a painful, enforced resignation until lately. They used to tell me I had talents and powers, but my health did not permit me to cultivate them. If I tried—and I did try—then I suffered, then I was sullen and resentful. But that is over now. Perhaps health and powers too will be made perfect in heaven. I feel a flood of music in my heart, my throat aches, my eyes fill with tears to sing, and I am voiceless. Madame Bouvier calls me her dumb angel, and says, maybe, mortal tongues are loosed in Paradise.'

Winny, in her plenitude of life, was profoundly touched. Nothing she anticipated, nothing she desired less for herself than translation to Paradise! She had been struck by no such sorrow as makes death desirable, or even realisable.

Lucy went on in her minor key: 'It has

come to this with me now, that I do not set my will against God's will. I am not fretted or afraid any longer—I am willing to be taken, and my mind is very quiet and peaceful—so peaceful that I sometimes think the time must be near.' She played softly on. Winny was silent from idle words of hope, where hope there was none, and of comfort where the best was in possession. Lucy was silent too, and understood her compassion better than if she had spoken. She herself changed the subject, and wished to hear of Winny's literary success. Winny bade her not talk of success—that was the name for ripe fruit, not for early leaves and buds such as hers were yet; she did not know that she should ever attain to success—give her, at least, ten years for that.

'But are you not delighted when people praise you?' Lucy inquired. 'Papa treasures the scraps of poetry that I write—he would be pleased to have them printed.'

Winny laughed with rather more indifference than she felt. 'Nobody that I care for praises me. Dick tells me that he would not write at

all unless he could write better, and my mother's prejudice is as active as ever. If I do succeed it will be in spite of discouragement. Strangers occasionally show me a little courtesy, tempered with curiosity. And the critics are civil.'

Lucy smiled: 'I should be unbearable if I had written a book, and the critics were civil to me! Papa and mamma would be filled with pride and vanity. Herbert would not dare to quiz, if he had the inclination. They would bind me in morocco and gold!'

'I could enjoy your foolish, genial domestic atmosphere, but providence decrees that I must stand out in the cold. I don't expect to be bought, much less bound—there are always the libraries. Just before I came to London I went to the bank with my mother to pay in a cheque. The old manager ventured to make her a compliment on her daughter, and what do you think was her reply—in her very chilliest voice: "I am told she has written a pretty novel—I do not profess to be a judge of novels. It was my desire that she should be a good governess?"'

Lucy laughed in her gentle, kindly manner : 'Your mother never did indulge tender foibles, Winny; the last time poor Dick was here, he complained of that.'

'I don't complain of it. I have a perfect reliance on my mother. She is not gushing, but she is to be trusted. As for Dick, I have seen him.' To have seen Dick rendered explanation unnecessary. Lucy drew a long breath, as if even to think of him was a weariness. He had tired them all out in Welbeck Street with his whims, his idleness, and his constant lack of pence.

He came that evening to tea, and everybody was pleasant except his Uncle Hayland. Mr Hayland found it needful to keep Dick at a distance. The young man paid him none the greater respect for that. Dick bore himself with the air of an injured person towards his uncle. He left early, having appointed Winny to come to his lodgings the next day at a certain hour, to be taken to see some of the lions of London. Winny went punctually, escorted by her Aunt Agnes, and was admitted

—but Dick's room was empty. The woman of the house told her that Mr Hesketh had gone out at noon, saying, that he should be back presently, and if his sister came in his absence, she was to wait.

Winny waited—first in hope, then in patience. She seated herself to look out of the window, but it was a quiet street, and there was nothing to see except the sun burning on the upper stories of the opposite houses, and a stall of vegetables, fruit, and flowers, presided over by an umbrageous, black-bonnetted woman, who knitted on a blue yarn stocking in intervals of business. The hours were tediously lengthened. The billiard-table was covered over now, and the cues in the rack. The chess-board was also out of sight. There were books about, of religious controversy chiefly, Dick having a turn for that—perhaps as a makeweight for his defective religious practice; and there was a folio of French social caricatures, puzzling to Winny in their dull monotony of vice. She shut that up soon, and reverted to the window. The sun had passed from the houses opposite, and the

shades of evening were drawing on. As there was yet no sign of Dick, Winny began to think of finding her way back to her uncle's house. It was not far from nine o'clock when her uncle, seated in his accustomed corner by the furthest window in company with his big Bible, espied her coming up the street alone—no, not alone; for trotting alongside her, agreeably conversing, was a small, barefooted Arab of the pavement, carrying embraced in his two arms a fine white-flowering geranium. Winny, in the emergency of not knowing her way, had hired him for a guide, and had found him amusing.

Mr Hayland was highly displeased with Dick's behaviour. Aunt Agnes excused it as his thoughtlessness. 'His selfishness—call it by its right name,' said her husband, correcting her. 'Dick fell in with something or somebody more engrossing, and he did not choose to put himself out for the mere duty of keeping his appointment with his sister.'

'I daresay he forgot all about his appointment,' said Winny, also anxious for a plea.

‘I have found that Dick has a very fine memory on his own account,’ rejoined her uncle drily. ‘He forgets only what it would be a little trouble for him to remember.’

The next morning’s post brought Winny a note of apology from her brother, fully assured of pardon for his failure of yesterday, and asking her to give him another chance to-day. Winny, however, declined to risk it, and wrote back that he must come for her. He did come—about two hours later than he was expected. Indeed, it was already towards evening. He had not decided where to take her to, but when they had walked some distance, a play-bill announcing the last night of a famous actress in a favourite part suggested the theatre. The stall tickets were seven shillings each, at which Dick whistled, but Winny said she would pay for both. Then her bonnet was an impediment; her dress of black silk and mantle of lace might pass, but by no means her bonnet. She took it off, and authority good-naturedly consented to her admission into the hindermost row of seats. She might have enjoyed the

play if Dick, who had seen it twice, had not relieved his tedium by talking and laughing at her ear until he got them both stared and frowned at for the disturbance they were to their neighbours. Dick thought she had become a very precise, punctilious body, and she decided in her private mind that he was not a desirable escort to places of public amusement.

It was an unfortunate evening altogether. On the way home, Dick told his sister a moving tale of his disadvantages for want of ready money, and twenty pounds (an inopportune accession of fairy-money from the amiable editor in the morning) found their way from Winny's pocket to his. He left her at Mr Hayland's door without going in. When Winny narrated where they had been, her uncle was gravely displeased. No one from his house, with his consent, ever entered a theatre. Poor Winny had to hear a lecture against those gates of perdition. And when she let her Aunt Agnes know of her benevolence to Dick, and that was communicated to

her uncle, he was more annoyed than by her other escapade. Dick's meanness did not astonish Mr Hayland (lazy, poor men are bound to be mean), but he expected more common sense from Winny, and he told her that she had better give him her money to keep while she stayed in London. Dick had pleaded the want of cash to pay arrears of rent. His uncle stated his belief that Winny's twenty pounds would be dissipated at the billiard-table; for that was the sphere where Dick's real energies were expended. Perhaps Winny was provoked with herself. Her aunt assured her it was useless, and worse than useless, to try to help Dick with loans or gifts of money; some day, perhaps, he might turn over a fresh leaf of his own accord, for he had a streak of quite uncommon caution in his character; but, for the present, he had given himself to a life of desultory work and steady amusement, and Winny might easily succeed in impoverishing herself without conferring on him one iota of permanent benefit.

These were hard words, and brought a flush

of shame to Winny's face. She considered meanness and trickery about money the lowest of vices. She endeavoured to extenuate Dick's acts by the severity of his difficulties and temptations, but Aunt Agnes perceived the danger of this, and would not allow her to remain under any misconception.

‘ Dick has no gratitude,’ said she. ‘ His uncle has been very good to him, and he has made him anything but a good return. I was fond of Dick's liveliness at first, but he turns sour and morose when he is thwarted of his pleasures and denied the means of indulgence. He has a prudence that is selfish, and a lavishness that is selfish too. Dick might correct his faults if he could be prevailed on to take to task-work ; but to enjoy his liberty he refuses to accept a situation, and proposes to do some business on commission. It must be very little business that he has to do ; for he is always needy, and if he feels that he has you to sponge upon, that will not mend him—you will not find him modest in the use of his advantage. We have had experience of Dick, and you must, you

really *must*, show him a stiff upper lip; he will be angry, and quarrel with you, perhaps, but never mind that. Your uncle is very vexed, and calls it cruel to rob you of your earnings. Your mother has grand notions of making women bread-winners—it is much if every one of them does not become answerable for some good-for-nothing man who will live in idleness on the fruits of her labour.’

Winny found nothing to reply to all this, nor did she get anything more satisfactory from Dick in the next interview they had. His business was not capable of being made clear to her comprehension, but she ascertained that it was non-productive. Just as they were about parting, it occurred to Winny to ask him a question. ‘How much have you left of my money, Dick?’ With an audacity of impudence that was quite unparalleled either in her experience or her reading, Dick thrust his hand into his pocket, and displayed upon his open palm two copper coins. ‘Then it is true, and you do gamble, Dick? I hope, at any rate, you

paid your lodgings?' said she with cool acquiescence in accomplished facts.

Dick laughed confusedly, and admonished her in the language of Scripture, saying: 'When thou givest a gift, give not uncomfortable words therewith!'

'I did not give you that money, Dick; I only lent it to you, and I expect you to pay it back,' she rejoined, administering the correction as firmly as her Uncle Hayland could have done himself, and in a voice just like her mother's when she was displeased.

Dick was sobered. 'You shall have it, Winny,' said he. 'All in good time.' And Winny did not spoil the effect by weak relenting.

Mr Hayland was a man of his word. In the course of the week he redeemed a promise given when Winny was in London before, to take her to Windsor and Hampton Court. Both excursions were perfect successes. And another long day she spent with him at Kew Gardens. The good old man's lot had all his

life been cast in the town, but he loved the country far better. He had the strongest prejudices against many of the things in which Winny delighted, but they remained excellent friends notwithstanding. He had never been of a temper to enjoy the amusements of the wicked world, but he claimed no merit for avoiding them. His disapproval of theatres, plays and actors, of novels and their authors, was hearty and unfeigned, and even artists did not entirely escape his opprobrium. It struck Winny as odd that he should be so thoroughly versed in the scandalous chronicle of these persons in whom he felt no interest. She inquired what had become of Mr Barton, that artist-friend of his own, in whose studio she had spent a long afternoon when she was in London as a little girl.

‘Oh, do you remember Barton?’ said her uncle. ‘He died two years ago, leaving a widow and several young children very ill provided for. He was the exception that proves the rule—a good man and a conscientious painter; but he did not get on. I hear that his

pictures bring double the money in the auction-room now that he sold them for when he was alive.' Mr Hayland did not consider it necessary to add how deeply in his debt Mr Barton had died, nor to tell that one of his boys was a charge to him still; there was some kinship between the Haylands and Bartons, and Mr Hayland had always recognised the claims and responsibilities of blood.

'Mr Caleb is prosperous,' Winny said rather inconsequently.

'Mr Caleb is very prosperous—many kind actions are reported of him,' said her uncle; and then in a tone of sarcasm very unusual with him: 'But I hope that your taste is not cultivated up to an appreciation of his pictures just yet?'

Winny did not admire Mr Caleb's pictures at all, but she said that it was very good of him and his wife to ask her to London. Her uncle rather coldly replied: 'You must learn to take such goodness for what it is worth. In London we are fond of new faces. You have written a book that is well spoken of, and you are

a new face to be seen—a writer of promise, I hear. New faces come and go every season. A few earn permanent distinction enough to become familiar, but most drop back into obscurity. It is wishing you no evil, my dear Winny, to wish that you may continue in obscurity. Such notoriety as is won by the writing of novels is anything but an enviable adjunct to a young woman.'

'I don't covet it,' said Winny impetuously. 'When I think of Dick I don't care ever to come to London again!'

'It is not necessary to make resolutions against London because of Dick,' said Mr Hayland cheerfully—perhaps, he felt that he had been rather too hard upon her. 'There are brothers much worse than Dick. Your aunt went to his lodgings one Sunday afternoon when we had missed him for a month, and there he was in his shirt-sleeves, with his windows wide open, playing chess with a poor young German engraver who is dying of decline. Dick has that sort of good-nature.'

'It is a pity that a man cannot live by play-

ing games,' said Winny with a despondent smile.

'Dick is given neither to drink nor to smoke,' said her uncle. 'He has no expensive whims, but the ruinous whim to excel at chess and billiards—he is at them half the day and half the night too. The skill of the game was its fascination to begin with; but when he dropt work, he had to discover some other means of getting his bread. Now he plays habitually for money, and the gambling spirit is in full possession of him. That excitement grows by indulgence until it is completely master of a man. I fear, I greatly fear, that Dick will always be more or less of an anxiety and a charge to his mother and you.'

'I fear it too,' Winny said. 'But you will keep a look-out upon him, uncle, will you not? We must not let him get into such very low water as to sink altogether. I can imagine that all his life long he will want lifting periodically out of the mire—I have no confidence whatever in a gambler.'

Winny spoke with a composed severity that

turned Mr Hayland into an advocate on the merciful side. 'Trust cannot be reposed in a gambler—all men of experience are of that opinion. But we must beware of manifesting to Dick that we are hopeless of his reformation. It is never too late to mend, and you may rely upon me not to lose sight of him.' Winny thought she recollected some speech of her uncle's to Dick about the men of their family never doing any good which Dick was apt to cite in excuse for his want of back-bone. But she said no more. Discussion of Dick always disheartened her.

Winny could find her way to her brother's lodgings alone now, and almost every day she went to his door for the chance of seeing him. She was most frequently disappointed. The last time was towards three o'clock in the day, and Dick said that he had not long finished breakfast. She had gone in the hope that he would take her to the Academy, for a second view of the pictures that had charmed her. Dick cried out that he was bored to death at the Academy, but when Winny said, then she

would go by herself, he jumped up in a fit of self-denying virtue, clapt on his hat, and went with her. Arrived there, he introduced her to a picture of Cairns' which had escaped her before; and then found a comfortable seat, tilted his hat over eyes, and disposed himself for a nap while she went in and out of the crowd to see what she could see. Perhaps an hour and a half elapsed before she thought of going back to the red bench where she had left her brother, time runs so fast away when one is well amused, and then, with a fear upon her that he would be tired of waiting, she sought the room and the spot. No Dick was there. It was possible that she might be mistaken, and she visited every room and every red bench again with a countenance of anxious research. Full twenty minutes did she distress herself with self-reproaches; the fact being that Dick had been claimed by an acquaintance within ten minutes of her leaving him, and had gone off on some private chase of his own, proposing to return—and had not returned. She was feeling rather spent, and looking decidedly pale and

unhappy, when, by great good luck, her friend Miss Denham espied her. Georgie had obtained that invitation to London which she had longed for, and the two middle-aged ladies in whose company she was, were the Misses Harvey-Phillipps, of whom she had spoken as good at taking a hint. They were sisters to Dr Harvey-Phillipps, a physician of distinction, who attended Mr Hayland and Lucy, and that gentleman was their escort now. Georgie was walking with him, and gazing skywards. She let her eyes fall wearily at some remark of his, and they fell on Winny Hesketh's face. She rushed to her relief, asking if she had lost somebody that she looked so tragical.

‘Oh, I have lost Dick—I am looking for my brother Dick,’ Winny answered, full of her immediate trouble.

Georgie craned up her head, and peered about, but as Dick Hesketh was not there, of course, she did not discover him. But she spoke comfortably. ‘He will come back in search of you by and by. Let us sit down where you left him, and have a chat. There is nothing that

tires me so much as seeing pictures,' she said, and Winny thankfully sat down.

It was not three weeks yet since the friends parted, but they had many things to say. Georgie was eager to ask if Winny had seen Mario in 'Faust.' Winny had not, but she had seen Ronconi in 'Figaro.' Georgie had seen everybody. She went to the opera three times a week ; music was her passion.

'And how do you like being a little lion ? How did you get on at the Calebs ?' Georgie inquired.

Winny laughed : 'I got on very well at the Calebs ; they were very good to me. But I am not enough of a lion for my relations to be proud. I wonder where Dick can be ?' She was still disquieted for Dick, and for how she should get back to Welbeck Street.

Georgie was in London for a month, and hoped she should see Winny often again.

'It is not likely,' Winny said. 'I don't think I should ever love London as you do. I am leaving next Tuesday. I shall stay at Southmead on my way down to Cotham, and shall

be really glad to see the dull old dusty Green again.'

Georgie said nothing to that. She apprehended that Winny had felt cold chills in London; very unlike herself who was in the midst of the warmest appreciation. Miss Harvey-Phillipps came up, and whispered that her brother had gone to call the carriage; and Georgie had to go. She wished she could have stayed to see Winny in Dick's charge, but as she could not stay, she admonished Winny to sit still where she was until he re-appeared; at which Winny nodded and smiled as bravely as she was able, with very faint expectations that he would re-appear at all.

And Dick did not re-appear. The crowd in the rooms began to thin, and she diffidently made up her mind that it would be best for her to go too. Dick had carried off the number of her parasol, but on explanation and correct description it was given to her, and she went out and down the imposing flights of steps, into the sunny clamour of the streets. Her intention was to take a cab, but though there was

an incessant rush of carriages and cabs to and fro, she did not know where to look for one for hire. She thought she could recollect the way Dick had brought her, and set off in faith. But it is easy to get lost in London if you are a young woman with an imagination that exaggerates the peril of crossings, and an enterprise that tries to circumvent them by turning corners in hopes that quiet side streets will lead ultimately to the same issues as the noisy main thoroughfares. With money in her pocket and a tongue in her head Winny was not likely to be lost long, but the experience was harassing, and it was some time before she encountered a policeman, to whom she had heard her uncle say strangers in difficulty ought to appeal rather than to passers-by. And even when she did meet one of these pillars of safety, and was bidden to follow him a step or two, and he would find her a cab, the step or two stretched over half a mile of hot pavement before an empty cab was secured. When she reached Welbeck Street and mounted to her room at last, she was ready to drop with fatigue, and to

make rash vows against Dick, against London, against pride and ambition of every sort. And then suddenly she burst out crying, and threw herself upon the bed.

Lucy spoke to her soothingly: 'You are tired, Winny dear, you are quite jaded and exhausted.' Ellen came to her succour: 'Let me help you off with your things, Winny—they are going to bring you some tea.' Aunt Agnes arrived to bid her control herself: 'Don't cry, Winny—your uncle will be so angry if he sees you have been crying—I suppose Dick disappointed you again!'

Thus adjured, Winny sat up, called herself a simpleton and a little fool, and having had her cry, much to her relief, shook down her hair, re-dressed herself with pains, and was soon fit to make her appearance in the drawing-room. Nevertheless her uncle did remark that she had been crying. In the morning she had a note by the post from Dick to tell her how vexed he was to find her gone when he returned to the Academy to seek her; he had had his walk for nothing, he said, and she ought to

have waited till he came. Winny was more than penitent enough, and offered amends by asking him to meet her at the station on Tuesday, promising to go by herself if he would. Her uncle was rather deaf, and no one liked him to set visitors off by the train on that account. Dick did not answer, but Winny took it for granted that he would be at the station, and went alone, having bidden the others good-bye at home.

However, Dick was not there; and in Winny's philosophy there was an alloy of profound dejection which caused her to subscribe to the wisdom of Solomon, and to sum up the results of her visit to London as vanity and vexation of spirit.

CHAPTER XVI.

MILDRED MARRIED.

‘You will live in the nursery—I pity you,’ Miss Denham told Winny Hesketh, when Winny mentioned that she was going to pay a visit of a week to her old friend Mildred Hutton in her new condition.

Yes, Mildred—Mrs Frank Jarvis—had a nursery already, and a baby in it—a very young baby, but bigger, handsomer, more knowing, and altogether superior to any baby that had ever been cast on the waves of this troublesome world before. This was the faith prevailing in the domestic circle at Southmead, and Winny Hesketh was required to accept it on the spot. The baby was a boy. She was introduced to him about the middle of the afternoon, all in her travelling dust—he reposing in his mother’s arms, and she contemplating him with the

moony abstraction of maternal rapture. Winny did *poojah*, and remained on her knees (or sitting back on her heels) for a very long while; in fact, until the master of the house returned from business, and looked in towards six o'clock, to say: 'Milly dear, dinner is on the table. O Miss Hesketh, have you not been shown to your room yet?'

'Don't wait to dress, Winny—come as you are. I shall not dress—Frank does not like to wait,' whispered her friend.

Winny chose the lesser evil, and went almost as she was. Baby was not present in the body at dinner, but in spirit he seasoned every dish. The wickedest, profane thoughts were the product in Winny's unregenerate mind. After dinner it was time for him to be put to bed, a duty Mildred remitted to no other hands than her own, and Winny was invited to assist at the ceremonial. She had never witnessed it before, and found it tedious, if interesting, and certainly capable of more rapid despatch.

'My mother says children bring love into the world with them. They ought to bring

love! If yours is a fair specimen, Milly, they bring trouble enough,' said she, disguising a yawn.

Mildred looked at her as if she had announced a heresy. 'Trouble, Winny? Oh, you don't know what a joyful trouble!' cried she. Winny felt the touch of compunction, and strove to make amends by suggesting that baby would be more amusing when more mature — but Mildred shook her head, and soothed his possibly wounded feelings with interminable caresses, and mild abuse of the offender in the clipped little language that babies are believed to understand.

Mr Frank Jarvis was pacing the lawn in front of the house, expecting his wife to come and join him in the cool of the evening. But he had a powerful rival in that small idol upstairs. Winny, sitting in the window-seat, was aware of his vigil, his long and patient vigil. 'Such is married life!' said she—not enthusiastically impressed.

'Yes, Winny dear, such is married life,' echoed Mildred, hearing a voice, but apprehending no

meaning that was in it. 'Such is married life! I always said that I never would sacrifice the comfort of my husband to my children, and I never will. A wife's first duty is to her husband. I am going to take a walk with Frank now.'

"I think he is waiting till you are ready, Milly; he has been pacing the grass this long while,' Winny informed her.

'Has he? dear Frank, he is so good—he is never out of humour—he knows baby must be attended to. But I never will put baby before him, never. No, my blessing! baby is very precious, but he must be content with the second place in his mother's love. I wish you had a baby, Winny, and then we could talk about it!'

At last, Mildred turned her back on the nursery, and went to put on her bonnet; suggesting to Winny that she must be too tired with her journey in the heat of the day to go out again. Winny had been anticipating a refreshing stroll, but she instantly acquiesced; reflecting that if Mr Frank Jarvis was in town

at business all day, his share of his wife's society could be but limited—too, limited to be encroached upon by a visitor who could enjoy it in his absence. When she had enjoyed it for a whole day, infused with baby's, she stumbled on the sleepy conclusion that they would be better company for each other now if she had conjugal and maternal experiences to reciprocate. Having none, she had to occupy the passive state of listener—and Mildred was as remorseless in the length and tenuity of her dissertations still as she had been when a maiden, in dire distress for Frank.

Then she made a discovery, for which it behoved her to be thankful. Mildred did not appear at breakfast, the post-hour when letters came in, and Winny was an astonished witness of the fact that married people have their correspondence in common as well as other things. Mr Frank Jarvis opened and read his wife's letters with the coolness of established custom. Winny asked if he read hers. With a merry confusion he confessed that he did. Winny made no remark, but the letters of hers he

had to read in future were fewer and dryer ; and she decided in her own mind that a friend who marries should be relegated to the retired list in the matter of confidences.

‘ Yes, indeed ! you had better adhere to me,’ was Georgie’s faithless reply when Winny communicated to her that discovery about the letters, and the conclusion she had drawn from it.

There was no other discovery to make at Southmead. It was the happy home of a young couple well-to-do, and entirely devoted to themselves and their belongings. Mildred was still fond of her friends, she said, but her time was now otherwise taken up. Only once did she seem to recollect that Winny might have separate and personal interests. It was on an evening when baby was in bed, and Frank gone out again to some town-meeting. She led her friend into the garden, and with her arm round her neck in the old style began to question her of the success of her literary ventures. Winny was very brief, but Mildred, having diverged from that line of life for ever, did not find her

too brief—then she asked Winny how it went with her heart.

To this she got no answer. ‘I am afraid it was Durant,’ said she, answering herself.

Winny turned her lips for a moment to the white hand hanging over her shoulder: ‘And if it was Durant, Milly, what matter now?’ said she.

‘It is a pity, that’s all.’

But there were no dissertations. Winny looked grave and rather pale, and coming in sight of the nursery window, Mildred reverted to her treasure with her usual inexhaustible flow of language. It was baby now instead of Frank, that was all, and he gave so remarkable a scope for the maternal imagination that Winny found him quite a study of character, and made several notes of him which were serviceable in her vocation later.

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER PAGE OF EXPERIENCE.

WHEN Winny Hesketh returned to Cotham from Southmead, she had another pleasing duty to perform. The long postponed event of Delphine Mercier's wedding came off this midsummer, and her Joe obtained lawful possession of a most valuable wife. They went to Hull to pursue their calling, Mrs Mercier accompanying them; and Winny, in losing by marriage this second friend of her youth, felt as if the years were running very fast away, and creating a solitude already in the world around her.

About this time it was that her life began to weary her a little. She had lost some of her elasticity. She went back to Rusdale after the holidays as other drudges go back to familiar toil after a respite. She was refreshed and rested, but she expected nothing and hoped

nothing in this place. The dead level of monotony stretched out years long before her. She would never have an easy task with her pupils at Hauxwell, but she desired to be able to stay there. The children were much ameliorated in behaviour and temper, and Isobel had fair abilities, but her sisters were very hard to teach. They retained nothing they learnt, seemed absolutely incapable of attention ; and Winny had too high a sense of duty to be satisfied with mere negative results. In striving to obtain something definite she only succeeded in making her work laborious. There are children of apparent sense who yet cannot acquire knowledge. If these attained to sufficient reading and writing for the practical purposes of life, it was all they would ever gain from her instruction. Mr Peregrine-Hart entreated her not to vex herself, and declared that he was satisfied with his girls, with every one of them, and their mother was the same. Why, then, should she be otherwise ?

Making allowance for its drawbacks, Winny's situation, now she was used to it, had great

advantages. It was a romantic and beautiful neighbourhood, and fine scenery was ever a joy to her. And the old house itself was full of interest. In the attics were collections of historic trash ; in the library was every book that she could wish to look into. There were young ladies of her own age, educated in Germany and full of accomplishments, living close at hand, fond of companionship, and less rigorous in keeping up distinctions than Mrs Peregrine-Hart could approve, and one of these became her friend. She had never had an hour's illness in her life, but she was treated as not robust, and had every indulgence that she could be persuaded to avail herself of. The second winter in the dales tried her much as the first had done, and old nurse was frequent in warning and counsel to take care, and not unnecessarily so ; for Winny, not knowing what pain was, and confident in her sound constitution, despised precaution, and seemed to fancy herself impregnable to its assaults. If she had not been very anxious to keep this home, since her home with strangers she must make, prudence would have

suggested to her before Christmas that it would be her wisest step to leave it ; but when March came with frost and snow and driving north-east winds, she was still there, and still replying to nurse's advice, that her cough would disappear with the cold weather, as it had done last year—she was very strong and healthy, and what was the use of making a fuss ? she had her work to do and her living to earn, and could not afford to give way to a little ailment.

Nurse told her it was by that sort of bravado many people's first sickness brought them to their deaths, while others, always croaking, hung on till the last of their generation. Winny did not want to die, she said, and she permitted nurse to multiply her care and comforts. But it was too late. No comforts or forethought could prevent the north wind or the shuddering frost ; and there came a night after a walk by the river on a bitter day, when Winny was roused to a new sensation of violent, burning pain, and to a consciousness that her house of life was broken into—whether she would or no.

There is nothing, perhaps, that habitually healthy young people realise with such difficulty as the fact that they are very ill—in danger, as it is cautiously phrased. Winny certainly did not realise it, though the animal instinct of longing for her natural refuge in distress was alert. As she was undressing by the firelight, Isobel heard her say to herself: ‘I wish, I wish I were at home.’ The girl sat up in her bed, and asked: ‘Why do you wish you were at home, Miss Hesketh?’

‘Because I am afraid nurse’s prediction is coming true, and that I am going to be ill,’ was her answer.

‘I have not been vexing you lately, have I?’ said Isobel.

‘Oh no, you never vex me now. But if I have to be ill I should like to be with my mother, and not give anybody else trouble.’

Isobel watched her slow and languid movements for some minutes, and then asked: ‘Have you a pain?’ but getting no answer, she subsided upon her pillow, and only thought she would tell mamma in the morning. The result

of mamma's being told was that the doctor was sent for, to whom Winny, in reply to his first question, expressed her urgent desire to go home immediately. She had become nervously anxious to start off without delay. The doctor was perplexed, for he could not consent.

'I would give you leave to go if the weather were not so bad, and threatening to become worse,' said he soothingly; but he told Mrs Peregrine-Hart that, under any circumstances, she was quite unfit to travel. And, in fact, she had to succumb to a sharp attack of inflammation, and to see her pretty white neck spoiled by the very sharp remedies necessary to reduce it.

Miss Denham who was visiting in the neighbourhood rode over to see her, and, as a dispassionate student of human nature, begged to be informed how she liked pain.

'I don't like it at all. Georgie, will those horrid leech-bites show?' asked vanity.

'Those horrid leech-bites will show till the day of your death,' was the amateur physician's uncompromising reply.

Winny was silent—whether reflecting on the disastrous permanence of leech-bites or on the day of her death was not apparent.

Georgie beheld her with sorrowful philosophy: ‘You are all eyes, Winny. More interesting but less beautiful,’ said she.

‘I wish I were at home,’ said Winny. Georgie kissed her, and said nothing.

During three days of summer in advance that April by special favour granted her, Winny Hesketh was taken home to her mother—a diminished bundle of dependent weakness, very touching, indeed, to the few people who loved her. For a good thing, as it happened, Mrs Hesketh’s apartments had just been vacated by two ladies who had occupied them through the winter, and Winny was installed in the parlour upstairs—where all her friends one after the other came to look at her.

Said Mr Anderson, still a bachelor, but growing fat and lazy: ‘Why, Miss Winifred, what has become of your high spirit, that you have let yourself fall away to nothing like this?’ He offered to play her some music, but she said,

she did not like noises—it was rude and cross, but, somehow, she could not help being disagreeable to Mr Anderson.

Said Miss Baxter : ‘ How is this, Winny, my dear ? We hoped you would live to close all our eyes.’ To which Winny answered : ‘ And now, don’t you think I shall ?’ Miss Baxter replied, ‘ That must be as God wills. You have youth on your side.’

Mildred Jarvis came all the long journey from Southmead, forsaking baby for an entire day, and bringing Winny a soft warm, white Shetland shawl to wrap her in, like a fleecy cloud, and she was lovely so. She had not much news—Mr Melhuish was going to marry Bella at Cranby, and that was all. She did not mention Mr Durant, whose name Winny longed to hear.

Miss Denham, lately returned to Cotham and her various pursuits, paid daily visits to Castle Green, and was always amusing. Her favourite hour was the dusk of the evening. She had not confessed her critical state of probation to her friend, nor did she confess it now,

and Winny never suspected her of such a secret. They talked of books, and Georgie entered into politics and social questions, as contemporary history. She wrote now for more than one periodical. Winny wanted to know what she wrote about, but Georgie answered that the subjects were not in her way, and Winny refrained from inquiry. But it was understood that Georgie had outstept her success by far. Winny's works showed in their exact proportions; Georgie's loomed large and imposing through the atmosphere of mystery in which she enveloped her transactions. Winny's, however, seemed to be the better paid.

The literary second string to her bow that she used to harp on hopefully, bore the strain of this bad time well enough. Mr Peregrine-Hart was not rich, but if any dependent fell ill in his service, he saw that unlucky person through it, and defrayed the doctor's bill; and when Winny was sent home her condition was not such as to necessitate constant medical advice, unless it be taken as a luxury. Mrs

Hesketh asked Dr Archer to call, but when Winny, as she was bidden by her mother, offered him his guinea neatly folded in paper, he said : 'No, no,' and put it down on the table. He was an old man now, and breaking up from over-indulgence, but he had still the confidence of the elder generation in Cotham when they could find him sober, and could still afford to be generous if he thought there was a need. He often came in afterwards of a morning, and would sit for an hour talking to Winny, who appreciated his talk—he had seen and known many people of distinction in the course of a long life-time, and also he said encouraging things to her about what she wrote, and did not consider it beneath his notice. Winny had discovered that it is by cultivated persons only that cultivation is cared for. At Hauxwell she would have won wider admiration if she could have taken a fence cleverly on horseback ; and amongst her old Cotham friends kitchen skill would have been far higher commendation. Dr Archer asked her one day if she had any relatives in the south that she could visit for a

change — but Winny had none, except the Clarksons at Clifton by Bristol, who were not available, being perfect strangers ; and besides, she said, she liked the quiet security and liberty of home better than she should like any change, at present. Yet she did look as if she wanted some impetus from without. Her appearance was extremely fragile and delicate, and she made a very slow recovery, though her fairymoney provided that she should miss nothing that could help it on. Her mother had to be thankful to Winny's scribbling now. The spring was late and variable, and none of her visitors flattered her that she would soon be strong again. Only her mother, judging of her by herself, refused to admit any fear that she would decline into an invalid. And certainly, Winny's own will was not that way bent. When the sun shone on the meadows across the river she longed to be out there ; but Cotham was low and damp, and Georgie did not hesitate to tell her that an hour's folly, a very brief relapse, and she was gone from

sunny meadows for ever. She must have patience.

Winnie Hesketh continued a pale, pretty picture of patience, sitting in Mr Nicholl's chair, and wrapt in Mildred's white cloud of a shawl until May days were nearly over. It was about this time last year that her valentine had come—she wondered often whether she should have another such merry visitant this. She had received but one letter from Mr Durant during the past ten months, and that one had followed its predecessor at no very long interval. Since then there had been silence. Winnie often thought of him with a serious, sad curiosity, but she was chary of mentioning his name. Other people seemed to have forgotten him—nearly two years he had been absent from England. One day when Georgie was especially benign, she asked her, blushing consciously as she did so, whether there was any news of late of that engineer, her half quarter Scotch cousin, who had gone

exploring with other adventurers beyond the confines of the known world in Asia.

‘None, none, that I have heard of,’ Georgie said. ‘But I will write to his sister Sidney, and inquire for you.’

The answer Georgie got she did not communicate in full to Winny Hesketh; she told her no more than that all was supposed to be well with all the party, since no rumour to the contrary had reached their agents. (The passage she suppressed was a casual mention that Mr Durant was absent on a detached service at the date of the engineer’s letter to his sister.) This satisfied Winny for a while. And then came a piece of better cheer. She began to take short walks with her mother in the morning sun, and was slowly but surely returning to the enjoyment of life again when Georgie made her a delightful proposal.

‘Listen, Winny, I have something worth listening to,’ she said, and Winny gave her attention. ‘I have to go to Paris for a week, and then to Switzerland for the purpose of finishing a task that I undertook two years ago.

This is the end of May. Before the end of July my time is up. Papa leaves me absolutely to my own discretion. Tom, who is too young to be in the way, will go as escort. Will you go with us, Winny? I will undertake the management of everything, of you too.'

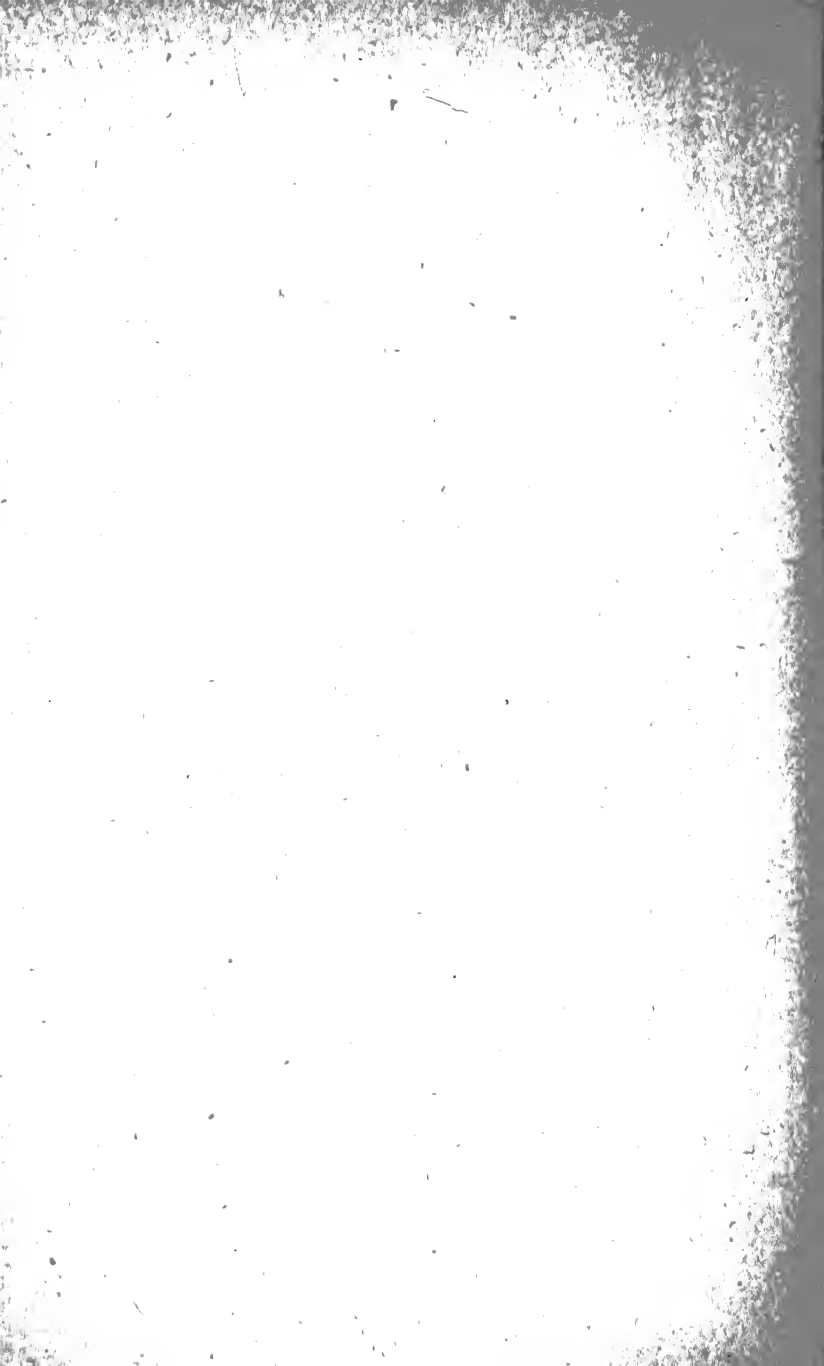
'O Georgie, how I should enjoy it, if my mother will consent!' cried Winny with rosy rapture.

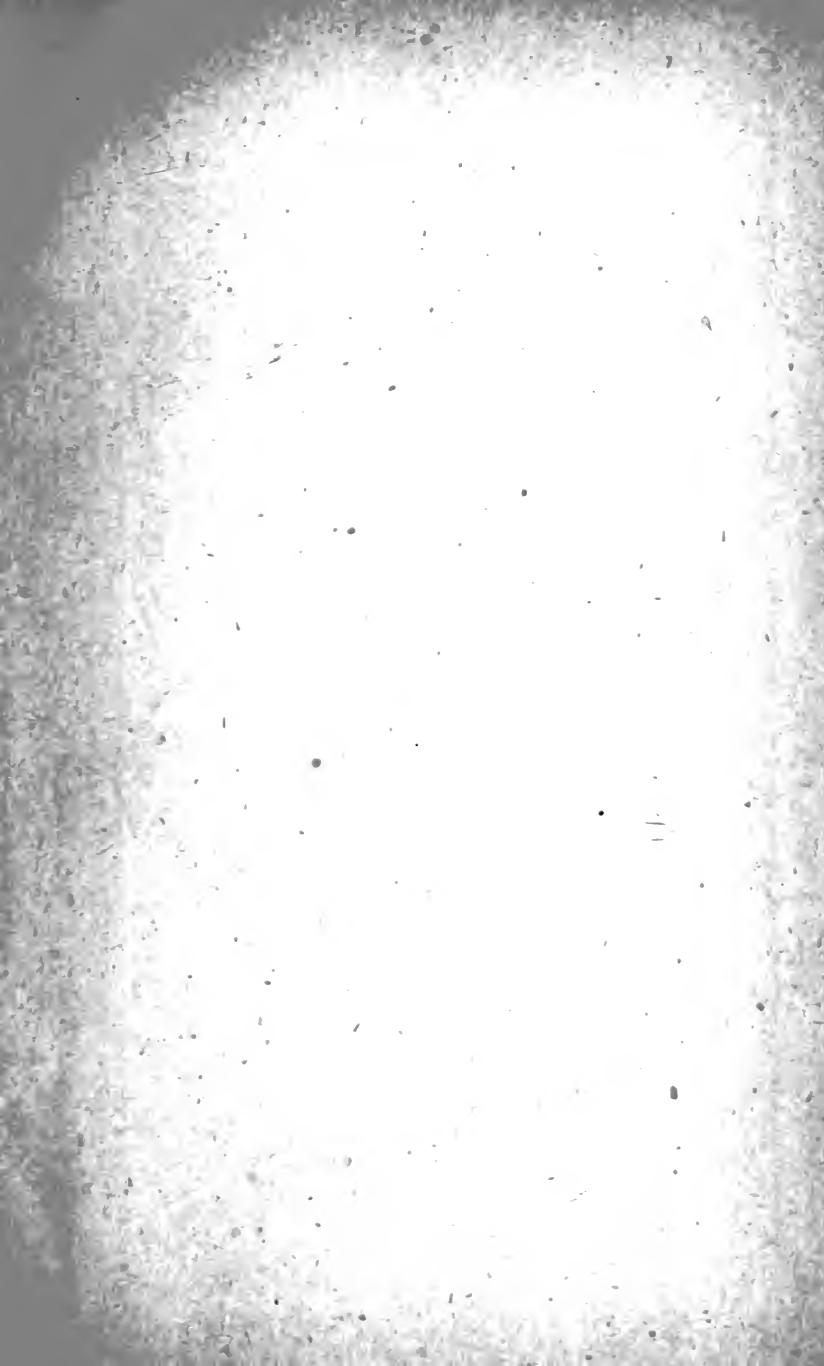
'I knew you would—and it will quite set you up again. You must talk to your mother, and get Archer to recommend it. You have superfluous cash, I know—what a rich young woman you are, Winny!'

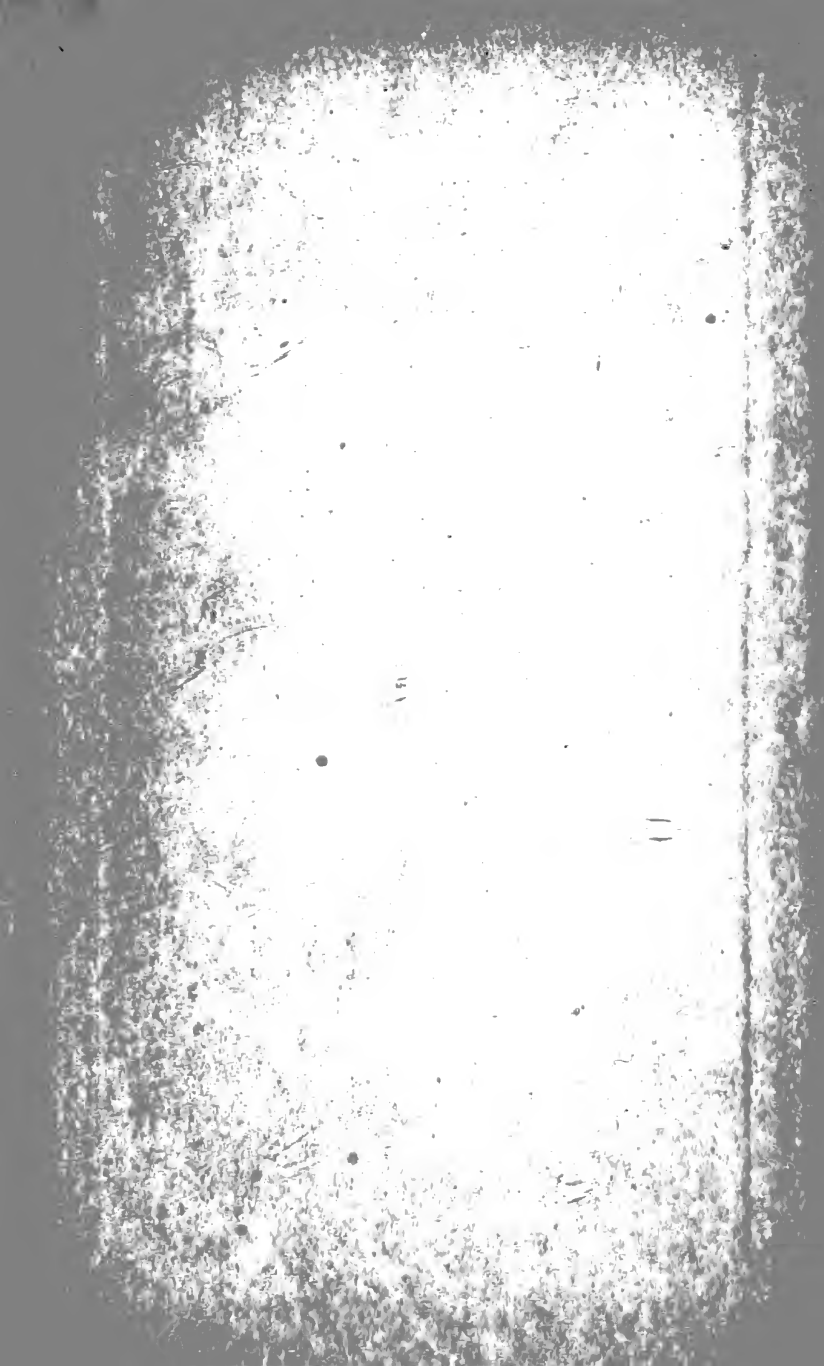
When Georgie's proposal was communicated to Mrs Hesketh, she agreed to it with the least possible demur, and Dr Archer said it was the very thing his patient needed. For reasons unexplained the widow regarded Miss Denham as a wise and accomplished woman of the world, to whose care she might entrust her convalescent daughter with the utmost confidence in the results. Her confidence was not misplaced. Georgie ruled and Winny obeyed—only by

docility on her part could peace be assured. Georgie was very near fulfilling that ideal of her sex described by Mons. la Bruyère, as a fine woman with the qualities of an excellent man.

END OF VOL. II.







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